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ELEANOR SMITH
F L A M E N C O

“ Des fées, des Tsiganes et sorcières
Ma nourrice me chantait ;
A mon tour je chante les sorcières,
Les Tsiganes et les fées.”

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To the memory of my Father

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PART I

FLIGHT OF EGYPT

CHAPTER I

THE midday sun, beating red-hot upon the scorched and dusty thickets mantling the low hillside, seemed to pour a burning breath, like that of hell itself, upon the limp, defenceless body of the man who lay concealed in a nest dug deep beneath a clump of cactus-bushes. He was Lobo, the Wolf—gypsy, smuggler, bandit, and murderer ; a price was on his head, yet it was not for that reason that he cowered trembling like a wild beast in the thickets, but because he was a pariah, an outcast, spat at by his own brethren, despised, distrusted, and reviled. He had but two friends, Pépa, his wife, and a brother-in-law, the blind and verminous Antonio. Save for these two, and for his children, he was denied all intercourse with his fellows. As far as the Busné, or white folk, were concerned, he was indifferent.

As he lay groaning and sweating in his lair, mechanically brushing the crawling flies from his face and beard, Lobo, although he had once fancied himself as a dandy, was now an ugly, almost a repulsive figure. He was thirty years old, lean, sinewy, and powerful ; his black greasy locks hung to his shoulders, dangling into his oblique squinting eyes, framing a swarthy, crooked face, scarred, weather-beaten, raffish, and impudent ; his beard was shaggy and unkempt, revealing a wolfish mouth, with brilliant teeth and full red lips. He wore a filthy disreputable shirt that had once been vivid pink, patched and torn green breeches, clasped below the knee with silver buttons, old rags wound like bandages about his thin shanks, and gold coins stuck in his ears. From his belt dangled a long evil-looking knife, the terrible weapon of the Andalusian bandit.

Twisting over in his earthen nest, he now lay on his stomach, his head buried in his arms. The sun smote his neck like a sword of flame, and cursing, he spread over it a bright dirty scarf torn impatiently from his neck. An hour passed. Then his ear, close to the ground, warned him of approaching footsteps. Scarcely moving, he slid his hand to his belt and grasped the hilt of his knife. An expression of sly tense watchfulness distorted his dirty roguish face. Then, a few paces away from his lair, the sound of a shrill whistle sent him scrambling from the bushes. It was Pépa, his wife, whose business it was to supply him with food.

She waited, immobile, while he sauntered forth among the rocks and boulders to meet her. At once he began to swagger. It would have humiliated him to reveal to her his misery, his terror, his black and sombre despair. Arms akimbo, he surveyed her critically.

"You are late. I have lain here for hours, fasting and sweating and dry of mouth. What kept you?"

"Eat, drink, and I'll tell you."

She unwrapped her bundle, handing him a loaf, cheese, and a bottle of cheap wine. Spitting, he seized the food, stuffing it into his mouth with ravenous gusto. She watched him in silence. She was a typical gypsy woman of Andalusia, thin, gaunt, hungry-looking, with a long narrow face, a sulky mouth, and dark half-shut eyes. She was patient, savage, and reserved. She wore a brief bodice, trailing dirty skirts of some bright flowered material, and half-a-dozen strings of cheap beads about her long sallow neck. In her sleek black hair was stuck a coquettish spray of jessamine, while her wrists were laden with heavy silver bracelets. She sat cross-legged, like an image, while her husband fed and drank his wine, hunched, morose, seemingly indifferent.

At last he flung at her, mechanically, his thoughts far away:

"Where have you left the brats this time?"

"With Antonio, in the hut."

"And the new one? When is that to be born?"

"You know very well that I am six months gone."

"And why were you late?"

"Ah-ha." She fixed him, for the first time, with her long and sleepy eyes, watching him narrowly, scarcely moving her lips as she replied :

"Last night Antonio went to the Café del Sol to hear the new guitar-player. He sat there in a corner, listening to the music, noticing no one. At last there came a troupe of Calés¹ from Ronda, who ordered much wine. When they had drunk, their tongues were loosed. They were friends, relations, of Corroto the One-Eyed."

She paused, for at the sound of that name Lobo's face had darkened. She continued after a moment :

"They talked of the One-Eyed, saying that he was the finest picador ever born of a gypsy mother, and then they spoke of his death, of the knife-thrusts in his body, and of the slits found in his nose and in his ears. They said that this was the work of Lobo ; that all the Calés of Seville knew Lobo was the murderer, but were afraid to speak, because they feared him. They said they had come, sent from Ronda by their chief, to see the Caló chief of Seville and demand a life for a life ; the life of Lobo for the life of the One-Eyed."

"Is that all?" he asked, staring at the ground.

"No. They said that since you, a Caló, had lifted your hand to another Caló, a brother, you were no longer of the dark blood. That even if your life were spared, you must for ever be outcast. And then they went to our chief, to José el Crallis, and delivered their message. This morning José came to Antonio and said that the brothers from Ronda spoke truth—that you were no longer of the blood. He said more. He has always liked you, although perhaps fearing you, and he does not wish to take your life. He gives you a warning."

She paused again, and Lobo laughed, but perhaps his laugh was not so reckless as he would have wished. She crept closer to him, laying her thin tawny hand on his arm.

¹ Calés = gypsies.

"José says that the Calés of the city are mad with hate of you—that they wish to avenge the One-Eyed by killing you. Already they sharpen their knives. Even he, José, is powerless. So he orders you to leave Seville for ever."

There were beads of sweat on Lobo's forehead. He said, controlling himself with an effort :

"I find that very droll, my sweet Pépa. Where would he have me go—to Ronda, perhaps?"

"He suggested Portugal, the land of the Laloro."

"Portugal!"

There was contempt in his voice, but he stared straight before him, seeing, perhaps, a limp dusty body, hacked with gypsy knives, a body that lay rotting in the sun, black with flies. His body.

He announced with dignity :

"I shall indeed leave Seville—the sooner the better—and it may be that I shall never return. But Portugal—sweet God, no! As soon would I go to Ronda, to be set on by the friends of the One-Eyed, like hungry ravens thirsting for my blood. Portugal!"

"Where, then, shall we go?" she asked unmoved.

He drank again from the bottle of wine, black brows drawn close together above his narrow eyes. Two days he had lain hidden in the thicket, and all the time he had secretly known that if he wished to live, he must escape, not only from Triana and Seville, but from Spain itself. Gypsy news flies quickly; wherever he went, Granada, Malaga, Barcelona, he would be recognised as the man who had murdered one of his brethren, the man who had outraged the law of the Romany people. Not only he, but also his wife and children, would be outcast. That was the law of his race, from which there was no escape. And so he must leave Spain. He reflected.

He was, like most of his class and epoch, illiterate, but he was intelligent, and he had an excellent memory. From time to time he had met wandering bands of gypsy people, musicians, acrobats, trainers of performing bears, who had

spoken to him of the far away lands in which they travelled. Always he had listened in silence, smoking his pipe, and thinking that it would be agreeable one day to wander, as was his birthright, over the globe. Now he was apparently to be forced away from Andalusia, and suddenly it occurred to him, with a swift eager thrill of excitement, that the whole world was his for the asking—he had but to choose. There was France, its long straight roads fringed with slim poplars, its northern orchards all white and rose with apple-blossom. Germany, its great majestic rivers winding amongst jagged and ferocious mountain-ranges. England, its purple heaths, its young woodland fresh with tender green. America, a vast continent of wild barren gypsy land, peopled with savages who lived, like the Calés, in tents. . . . And all this was his for the asking.

And then he thought of Seville, of his life there, lawless and ferocious, filled with dark and bloody deeds of plunder and smuggling and rape; of his comrades, reckless and evil and gay, mountain pirates who lived by their wits and by the knife; of merry carousing evenings in shadowy cellars, where he became drunk, not so much on wine, as on the wild wicked *flamenco* singing that was howled to guitars from dusk to dawn; of the bull-ring on tropical scorching days, when he sat in the sun with his friends and shouted mad applause as gypsy comrades killed their bulls. This was his life; he had been bred to it, but now he was an outlaw, and it is said that a gypsy has no roots. He would start his life afresh, he and Pépa and the brats and perhaps blind Antonio. Suddenly he smiled, revealing his wolfish white teeth.

His wife, watching him with her strange, heavy eyes, able in some measure to read his thoughts, knew a little of what was in his mind. She guessed that part of him regretted Seville, that he was stricken, bitterly humiliated, by this ostracism from his brethren; yet she knew that deep down in his heart he was also glad, that all the gypsy in him stirred, rejoicing, at the prospect of wandering on the face

of the earth, perhaps for months, perhaps for many years. Already he was miles away from her, planning and scheming. Something moved within her—her unborn child. She had forgotten it. She laughed, pressing her hands against her body.

“What is it?” he asked, brought back to reality by her laughter.

She answered eagerly :

“It’s the child. I felt it moving. And I thought, the little fortunate one, to be born, not in a hut here nor yet in the thickets, but out on the road, a thousand miles from here, on the road, where all Calés should be born.”

He became suddenly gloomy.

“A fine Caló,” he sneered, “bred of a father who is cast out from among his brothers.”

With a lithe movement she sidled close to him, sliding her arms about his neck.

“Listen, my heart. For more than two months I’ll be able to sing *flamenco* songs for you and dance for money in the strange countries where we’re going. Haven’t I always brought you money? Before the others were born, didn’t I wander miles, telling fortunes to the Busnés?”

He reflected. She had indeed been a good wife. He pulled her nearer, kissing her violently on the mouth, then pushed her away from him with a rough kindness. There was much to be settled.

“We will start,” he said, “to-morrow at dawn, working northwards, towards the country of the French. Go back now, find Antonio, and tell him that before to-night he must buy a *cangallo*, a cart, in which to pack the blankets, the pots and pans, everything from the hut. Then the two mules must be given corn, for they have many miles to travel before sunset to-morrow. At dawn I will meet you here, on the track below the hill.”

She scrambled to her feet, her long garish skirts swinging out like a bright fan round her body.

“And what of Antonio?” she asked bluntly.

"Antonio?"

To tease her, he pretended to consider, hands on hips, shaggy head bent.

"Antonio?" he said again. "Would you saddle me with a blind beggar, when I must fight for money to keep us on the roads of many countries? And you with child—soon another mouth to feed?"

Pépa was obstinate, and fond of her brother. She said calmly, her arms folded across her breast:

"Antonio must come. Without us, and without the children, I think he would fall sick and die."

"And why not? He would be one blind mole the less, that's all."

And he was thinking to himself, with a curious sadness, that he almost envied his brother-in-law, since Antonio, blind and filthy as he was, was still a gypsy, one who had never lifted his hand against a blood-brother. . . . He said hastily, seeing that Pépa was becoming sulky:

"Bring Antonio, if you wish. What do I care? Tell the old fox to bring his *pajandé*, his guitar. Wherever I am, among the mountains, in snow or rain or sun, I will still hear gypsy music, although I killed the One-Eyed. That they cannot take away from me."

"Good," she said, "*adws*."

"God go with you."

And with a flirt of her skirts she was gone, treading the dusty path with long swift strides, swinging her hips, gliding quietly, like a snake.

Lobo crawled back into his nest. One night more. He lay on his back this time, staring up into the hot and sulky blueness of the sky. One night more. And in his ears sounded the creak of wagon-wheels, the plodding sound of horses' feet; before his eyes danced, like ribbons, the vista of a hundred long and dusty roads. So had his ancestors stumbled, hungry and weary and sad, half across the world from India, through Persia, Arabia, Turkey, and Austria, flitting like dark shadows, footsore, patient, and restless,

spurred on by a devilish energy that allowed them to pause only when they were hungry or in need of sleep. And so would he travel, he and his family, many miles away from that narrow twisted street in which had been found the mutilated corpse of Corro, the one-eyed picador. And at the thought of that huddled bleeding body he shuddered as he lay there on his back in the earth ; for although he had taken the life of many Busnó travellers, this was the first gypsy to die by his hand. And he was an outcast. He tried to think again of the road, and soon, as the sun grew less fierce, he sank into a deep and sodden sleep.

CHAPTER II

It was in August, 1820 that Lobo the Wolf set off from Triana in Seville with his wife, his children, his brother-in-law, and all his earthly possessions, which included two mules and a lean emaciated hound. The expedition began soberly enough at dawn. Lobo had slept lightly, and was ready, waiting, when stars still peppered the violet summer sky. He had eaten, and he prepared himself for his adventure by tying, turban-wise, a crimson silk handkerchief about his straggling inky locks. Then, looking strangely like a Red Indian brave, he amused himself by sharpening his wicked Manchegan knife, until the stars grew fainter, bars of creamy-yellow streaked the sky above his head, and in the distance echoed the creaking rattle of wheels. Then, soft-footed, he descended the hillside and stood motionless to await his family.

Soon they came. A crazy, rickety cart, drawn by two gaunt mules, and bulging with rags and bundles, pots and pans and children. By the side of the mules walked Pépa, proudly erect, leading by the hand her brother, the bowed and blind and disreputable Antonio. At their heels capered the dog, Zincalo, who seemed to look forward to the adventure with enthusiasm. The children, too, were gleeful, and screamed with delight when they caught sight of their father. A girl and a boy, the one six, the other four years old, Manuela and Sebastianillo were stark naked, nut-brown, and already sharply intelligent of feature. Antonio, whose garments would have disgraced a scarecrow, was prematurely bald, darker than a mulatto, and sly and wild despite the terrible sightless eyes, which turned restlessly this way and that as though he would, by staring, force

back that curtain of darkness which must for ever enshroud him. A more savage, more entirely primitive party it would have been impossible to imagine, as they paused there on the rough mule-track to await the commands of their leader. Yet there was about the little group a rude and primitive but undeniable beauty ; they were unselfconscious as animals ; it was impossible for any one of them to make a movement in which there was not a certain wild grace ; their dark locks seemed to stream as though some elfin wind were blowing them ; their curious eyes, dead-black and staring, were utterly unlike the eyes of civilised people in their strange oblique remoteness. Here were barbarians ; rugged, sinewy, possibly murderous, but somehow splendid in their unspoiled animal vitality.

Lobo wasted no time. Climbing into the cart, he slapped the reins, and the crazy vehicle jolted forward. It seemed entirely natural to everyone that the strong male of the party should drive, while the pregnant woman and the blind man walked like slaves at his side. At first he was moody, and cuffed the children, who crawled away whimpering to the back of the cart. At last, after about fifteen minutes he paused, and, turning his head, leaned back to gaze for a moment upon the white and gleaming huddle of loveliness that was the city.

“ *Adios, Sevilla !* ”

And then he whipped up the mules once more and, suddenly happy, began to sing. Antonio, scraping and hobbling behind Pépa, raised his voice to join in the music with all the force of his lungs. Soon Pépa herself contributed her shrill untrained voice, and even the children, huddled among bundles and pots, began to snap their fingers and contort their limbs in time with the melody.

At last Lobo fell silent.

The cart was rattling now along a wild, rutty track, bordered on either side by a scorched and craggy plain bristling with boulders and tufts of cactus-bushes. Lobo mused. Here, near the approaching ravine, he had recently

robbed a rich merchant, on his way to Malaga, pocket stuffed with gold, one who bestrode a sleek and well-fed ass.

"Look here, Pépa !"

Dramatically he produced from his belt a canvas bag, heavy and clinking. She was surprised, as he had wished her to be, and, peering into the bag, she turned to Antonio, describing with much vivacity the many beautiful gold coins within.

"Then you are rich, brother?" asked the blind man, who was also astonished.

"Yes, I am rich. We can live for months in comfort. Soon, when the money is spent, you will play the guitar, Pépa will dance, and I will shear a mule or two for the accursed French. But for the moment our affairs prosper."

He thought, as he spoke, of the pleasures he could have relished spending this money in Seville; much wine, coins tossed carelessly to the *flamenco* singers in his favourite tavern, a gold ring for himself, a splendid flowered shawl for Pépa, a *palco* for the whole family at the bull-fight. . . . and then he shrugged his shoulders. As well spend his money on the road! Pépa and Antonio, enraptured by this sudden wealth, broke into a faster walk, conscious of a fierce exultant joy that made their bodies tingle with life and energy.

They passed through the ravine.

Lobo cupped his mouth with his hand.

"*Olé* for the rich merchant who died here in this pass, leaving his gold for the gypsies!"

The children screamed with laughter, finding these paternal witticisms inexpressibly droll.

"How did you kill him, Lobo?" Antonio demanded.

He enjoyed telling them.

"The night was warm—there was a full moon. I lay behind that boulder, grasping my knife, Soon I heard the clink of the ass's feet. Like a snake, I edged nearer the road. He approached, casting a long black shadow before him. I waited one second, until he was in front of me; then I

sprang, like the wolf after which I am named. One clean thrust and he was dead, and his face was peaceful, for I had surprised him, and he had not known that he was to die. I robbed him and made off, not daring to steal his ass, for by that I might have been discovered."

Pépa's comment was :

"One Busnó the less," and once more the children shouted with glee.

The party went forward. Soon Lobo dropped his son and daughter over the side of the cart, making them scramble down the track in pursuit.

Pépa protested. "They are too young to walk !"

He shook his head. "A gypsy is never too young to walk."

And the children tumbled after the cart until their feet were sore and blistered.

They passed few people. Occasionally a horde of Andalusian horsemen from the ranches near by, dark sunburnt men in high-crowned sombrero hats, riding muscular ponies which galloped like the wind. These scowled at the gypsies, passing fleetly without a sign. Then, as they found themselves upon a broader road, they were swept to one side of it by the lumbering approach of a huge unwieldy *diligence*, coming no doubt from Madrid, drawn by four sweating horses ridden by postilions in white and scarlet. These men swore at the gypsies for obstructing the road. Lobo stared at them impassively until they were gone, swallowed up in a cloud of dust and steam. Then, with a shrug, he took up the reins once more.

They slept that night beneath the stars, exhausted, their heads pillowed in their arms, while a few feet away the mules dozed standing up and the mangy dog whined in its sleep. The next morning they were gone before the sun had risen, no longer sweating and weary, but fresh, restless, eager to tramp all day along this rude and winding road that led to the land of the French. The country was still desolate. On either hand lay barren and dusty plains, scarred with rocks, tangled with sun-dried shrubs and

bushes. Here and there, herds of cattle, peacefully grazing in the distance, showed that some rich farmer, living near by, bred bulls for the ring ; this meant that somewhere in the neighbourhood there were comfortable ranch-houses, but the gypsies envied the owners not at all. Once they passed a goat, nuzzling a fat kid ; soft-footed, Lobo crept back to strangle the young animal and at noon fed his family on sweet and tender flesh.

After midday the dust became unendurable. It rose about them in thick white clouds, stifling them, making the children choke and cry. Lobo, driving, rebuked them teasingly.

"My son, Sebastianillo, is no true Caló. Otherwise he would do as his father does—as all true gypsies do—swallow the dust and laugh, because his stomach is no longer empty."

Once they passed another party of gypsies, wild men, bestriding asses, returning to Triana. These eyed Lobo sullenly, with cold black serpents' eyes. Undoubtedly they had heard of Corro's murder. He stared back defiantly, but his heart was heavy. He longed to be rid of Spain.

When they passed through villages, he sent Pépa fortune-telling, but the villages were small, the peasants terrified of gypsies, and her takings pitiful. To her surprise, he was not angry.

Three nights passed, four, five. Soon they had been on the road a week, and the children, whose memories were short, could remember no other life. Manuela, who was fond of her uncle, led him by the hand for many miles, describing graphically the wild scenes through which they passed. At night, when he strummed on his guitar, she danced for her father, tired though she was, flinging her thin childish body into the lithe agile poses of the *romális*. Her capers amused him mightily.

The hardships of their journey were agonising. The cruel blinding dust seemed to increase each day in intensity ; the savage heat of the sun scorched their bodies and parched

their throats, until sometimes their swollen tongues protruded from their mouths, like the tongues of thirst-maddened dogs ; the roads, scored with ruts and holes, not only bruised and blistered their feet, but shook their bodies pitilessly when they climbed into the cart to rest for an hour or two. Pépa, the wise, thought of her child and preferred to walk, and she would stride at the head of the mules, swift and tireless, for the greater part of the day ; but as the weeks passed and they neared Madrid, she rose each morning feeling a little clumsier, a little more listless, a little more inclined to sit drowsing in the sun, idle, and at peace. Yet the one who suffered most was Antonio.

Sooner or later the others grew tired of leading him, and then he was forced to attach himself by a piece of cord, gripped in his hands, to the tailboard of the cart. The mules walked faster than he liked, and often his blindness sent him plunging into holes and ruts. Wrenching his ankles, and terrified of breaking his legs, he would call to his brother-in-law :

“ Lobo, Lobo ! Is the road smooth in front ? ”

And Lobo, hunched up, morose, brooding over the death of the One-Eyed, would fling back over his shoulder :

“ Am I your eyes, blind bat ? Use your wits—hang on to the cart.”

Pépa, who loved her brother, seemed, when she walked, to become absorbed, aloof, possessed by one desire only—to move on. She was always thinking of her child. Where would it be born—in the Basque pine forests, near the marshes of Provence, on the banks of the Seine, or perhaps, for she had little idea of distance, beneath an oak-tree in an English lane ? Always, when she had been with child before, she had been the same—brooding, detached, seemingly isolated with the unborn child in some mysterious secret world of their own ; yet when her children were strong enough to do without her, she invariably became indifferent, like an animal, all the fierceness of her maternity quenched like a firework damped by rain.

They had started their travels to the sound of gypsy music ; soon, as heat and dust and hilly roads and fatigue took each in turn its toll, they were silent as they plodded forward, and bowed and grim and sometimes near despair. Yet they were not defeated, for at night, when the stars became blessed because they brought with them coolness, when they kindled a fire to fry their food, and squatted cross-legged about it, rested and at peace, once again there was music. They were never too tired for that.

After many weeks, they reached Madrid.

CHAPTER III

They entered the city at dusk, and bewildered by the noise and bustle, the colour and gaiety of this great town, furtively and instinctively they at once made their way to the gypsy quarter. Here were narrow slices of streets, sluttish, tortuous, twisted like corkscrews, vaguely sinister, the houses showing blank white faces, the doors closed, and the windows shuttered and barred like wild beasts' cages. The streets themselves, knee-deep in piles of filth and refuse, stank of garlic and scum. From one mysterious slip of a house came the faint wild strumming of a guitar, and once, so far away as to sound hollow and ghostly, the guffaw of a laughing man. A woman passed swiftly, dark as a negress, wrapped in rusty black. Lobo hailed her.

"Where is the house of Juan Moreno?"

She looked at him for a moment and muttered:

"The second house on the right hand," then shuffled away, her felt slippers making no sound.

"Come," said Lobo to the others, "here we shall find lodging for the night. This Juan is well known in Seville—a fine Caló, by all accounts."

And walking towards the house from which echoed the guitar, he knocked loudly upon the door. The music stopped abruptly, in the middle of a bar. For five minutes or so there was complete silence; then suddenly, and still without a sound, the door was thrust open a few inches, revealing, like a dark mask, the cunning watchful face of an elderly man.

Lobo swaggered forward.

"You are Juan Moreno?"

"I am. Who wants me?"

"A Caló, a brother, seeks lodging to-night for himself and his family."

The eyes of Juan Moreno, black and dead-looking, filmed over as the eyes of gypsies sometimes are, narrowed until they became menacing in their cold and piercing scrutiny.

"It is the Wolf, from Seville, eh? I heard of you on the road. You cannot stay here, and you are no brother; so go, you, your woman and your brats, for this is a house of Calés."

A slam, and the door was shut in his face. He stood there for a moment as though petrified; then, raising his fist, tried to bluster, as though Juan Moreno was still standing before him. But this was a failure, and, glancing round, he perceived that all the windows round about were now crowded with peeping faces—sullen, swarthy, hostile faces, that stared down upon him with a strange, detached, and contemptuous gaze. One or two spat indifferently. Otherwise they made no sign, but the ghost of Corroto, the one-eyed picador, seemed at that moment to stalk in the silent street beside Lobo's cart. In silence, his face still impassive, he approached his mules, and, seizing their bridles, began to drag them forward. Antonio, leaning against the wheel, was nearly flung on his back. Pépa, weary to death, stuffed her bundle back into the cart, and patiently, without a word, trudged after the mules. The children, huddled together in one another's arms, had awakened for a moment at the sound of voices, but now, shaken by the familiar motion, they sighed, dropping off to sleep once more like young animals.

It was almost dark.

After about ten minutes Pépa ventured: "Where are we going?"

Lobo answered curtly: "We will camp outside this pestilential city."

Through long broad streets they made their way, mingling with a stream of carts and carriages, past crowded cafés blazing with lights and blaring with music, past church

doors, still open, since it was Sunday, revealing occasional glimpses of glittering altars, wafting faint drifts of incense to the nostrils of the gypsies, to whom it was sweeter (being no more familiar) than perfume. Sometimes they passed groups of officers, capes swinging, spurs clinking, cigars glowing like red eyes in the blue dusk of the evening. Once or twice Lobo paused to ask the way out of the city, and was answered gruffly, stared at with suspicion. Doggedly, he returned in silence to his mules, and they went forward. Once or twice Pépa faltered, and soon she was hanging on to the cart as though to steady herself, while Antonio, as was his custom, contrived to stick his big splay-feet into every hole in the road, cursing horribly as he stumbled and tottered.

Once they heard a burst of drunken singing and had only time to shrink into the gutter before there passed, at full gallop, an open carriage drawn by two white mules. Inside, very much at his ease, lolled a slim young man, indolent and bored, ivory-skinned and almond-eyed, bedizened like a jewelled prince, while around him, swarming monkeywise all over the carriage, clinging round his neck, seated at his feet, quarrelling and singing, were half-a-dozen young and handsome women, glowing, laughing, shouting, shrieking, looking like brilliant flowers in their exquisite gaudy shawls. It was a great matador returning homewards after a fête given to celebrate his triumphs of the afternoon, seated, like a grave young god, amongst the most famous women of the town.

Wearily, apathetically, the gypsies stared after the party and got back on to the path.

Their throbbing feet were battered and bleeding, their legs limp, like the legs of a man who lies sick, their wretched bodies stiff and aching with the strain of the effort that drove them on. Lobo, his shoulders bowed, walked always in front. Once Pépa protested abruptly, her eyes like those of an animal :

“Lobo, I can go no further if you want your child born alive.”

She had never before complained. He paused, turning to look at her, then in silence strode towards her, picked her up in his arms, and went forward again, bracing his shoulders ; but his legs sagged and the sweat streamed down his face. She had cowered, expecting a blow, and the relief, the joy of being carried, were so exquisite that tears rolled down her cheeks, although she was not aware of them. She pillowed her cheek against her husband's shoulder and relaxed, closing her eyes. The mules, exhausted, stumbled frequently, but Lobo himself was too weary to rebuke them.

The lights of houses had at first been thick on either side of them, like banks of fireflies ; now, as they staggered on, the lights were fewer, there was less traffic, and the streets were quiet, save for an occasional drunkard. They were at the boundaries of Madrid. Another half mile, and they reached a squalid dusty *plaza*, surrounded by a grove of plane-trees. On one side of this square rose the wide shallow steps of a church. Here they could rest. Mechanically Lobo unharnessed the mules, dumping a bundle of hay before them, although they were too tired to eat ; then he turned to his wife. She had collapsed, like a bundle of old clothes, and smiled at him before she slept, her black head pillowed on the lowest step of the church. Antonio, querulous, groping vaguely about him, soon followed her example. The children had been for many hours unconscious and were still huddled uncomfortably in the bottom of the cart. Even the dog lay stretched out as though dead.

Lobo fetched his blanket, rolled it in place beneath his head, and sank upon the ground. They made a strange and savage group. Lobo lay on his back, a red handkerchief spread over his face. His limbs ached, his clothes were stiff with sweat, his eyes were heavy, but he could not sleep, being sick with shame and grief.

Juan Moreno. The scowling hostility of his face, the scornful ferocity of his refusal to take in the family of the Wolf. The faces of the other gypsies, peering furtively at the outcasts, the sullen men, the women tittering behind their

fingers. Those faces. He would never forget them. He groaned. He thought once again, heavily, hopelessly, of his quarrel with Corro. He had had no time to reflect—everything had been over so quickly. The dispute had started over the sale of a young ass, and Corro had sworn that he had been cheated. They had stood arguing in a quiet, dark, wicked street, and both had been drinking. Then he had seen the fingers of the One-Eyed creep towards his knife, and in a flare of sudden and terrible rage he had drawn first. One swift, powerful, dexterous stroke, and the picador had collapsed, slowly, drunkenly, like some tottering scarecrow in a field. And then, with this heavy lump of a body lying before him and his fury still unappeased, he had deliberately set upon the corpse the terrible marks of the Wolf. And so they had tracked him. One always knew the victims of Lobo. Juan Moreno . . . the faces of those staring gypsies . . . he rolled over on to his side, and the longing to be rid of Spain became a nagging hunger that would not be appeased.

At his side Antonio snored almost triumphantly—Antonio, who was still a Caló, in spite of the company he kept. The despised Antonio, unconscious of his brother-in-law's intent and sombre scrutiny, lay sprawled upon his back, his limbs looking as though they could not possibly belong to him, his grimy pock-marked face turned up to the stars, which shimmered down with a cold radiance upon this grotesque spectacle.

"*Jésu Maria!*" groaned Lobo, and turned his head away. He glanced instead at Pépa, curled like a cat on the bottom step of the church—Pépa, who was in a few months to bear his child in some unfamiliar land, a child that would, he reflected moodily, be born disgraced, although he had never heard tell of the sins of the fathers. If he could have foreseen what was actually to be the destiny of this child, he might have resolved that night to strangle it at birth. But fortunately the Wolf could not see into the future, and, ceasing at last to torment his brain with the

emotions of rage and shame and remorse, he crawled across the ground to where Pépa was lying, and flopped suddenly asleep, with his head upon her trailing flowered skirt. There they were found at dawn the next morning by a solemn bespectacled priest, hastening forth to visit a dying man, and by his companion, a little impish-looking altar-boy, bell in hand, who stared curiously at the gypsies with round bright eyes, like the eyes of a field-mouse.

And then, after a hurried breakfast, on once more.

CHAPTER IV

And yet, in spite of cruel and galling hardships, heart-breaking fatigue, savage heat, mosquitoes, dust, and the lameness of one of the mules, October found them over the French border. At first they had thought that they would be turned back once more into Spain, which had become for them a land of bitter memories, but, fortified by a bribe, their plea that they were travelling musicians persuaded the soldiers at the frontier to allow them to set foot in France, where they were soon swallowed up. And they still had money. On the journey up from Madrid, Lobo had taken care each Sunday to journey to the bull-rings in which the great summer *corridas* were being held. Here, at the entrance to the more expensive seats, he made Pépa sing *flamenco* songs, while Antonio played her accompaniments on the guitar, and even the children were sent begging pennies in the crowd. They usually earned enough money to keep them for a week, and thus, when they arrived in France, the merchant's purse, although thinner, was still filled with precious gold pieces.

The country of the Basques became for more than three months the home of the gypsies. Here, in the wild and sullen pine-forests, they were happy, and against this dark background bloomed once more, like bright and hardy flowers that have survived transplantation to an alien but nourishing soil. These forests, thick and sombre and forbidding, infested with wolves and robbers, roamed across hill and dale from Bayonne to Fuenterrabia and on to the foot of the silver-crested Pyrenees. Aisles and arches of tall, straight, reddish stems and dense bat-black foliage, through which might sometimes be glimpsed, in the

distance, a flash of faery greenish sea—silent, secretive, mysterious, deserted save for an occasional charcoal-burner's hut, or herds of snuffling wild boar, or a solitary and skulking grey shadow that was a wolf, this land might indeed have been fashioned for the gypsies, so admirably was it adapted to their peculiar needs. Here they were free, living amongst themselves and far away from the Busnés; here they wandered at liberty amidst trees that were darker and wilder even than themselves; snaring rabbits and squirrels and hedgehogs; feeding from nuts and berries that they pulled carelessly from over-laden bushes; building up their brief fires from the russet fir-cones that carpeted the ground. At night, over these same fires, there was much snapping of fingers, twitching of bodies, and triumphant howling of gypsy songs. And here, too, Pépa, rested after the hardships of her journey, gave birth to her third child.

When her pains began she cried to Antonio:

"Play to me on the guitar that I may forget how my body aches."

He obeyed, and so the child of Pépa was born almost triumphantly, to the strains of *flamenco* music. It was a girl, a sallow scrap of a baby with a tuft of hair like black silk and tiny fists that beat the air desperately, as though resenting this savage world into which it had been thrust. Pépa, spent after her ordeal, lay back on a couch of pine-boughs, sweat on her face, heavy eyes closed, while Manuela, not yet seven, nursed and tended the baby with all the skill and efficiency of a practised midwife. Lobo, who much disliked such feminine upheavals, had gone off snaring rabbits in the forest and returned only after his family life had been restored to something approaching normality.

He found Pépa asleep and Antonio still strumming softly upon his guitar. The blind man held up his hand for silence.

"Don't wake her, Lobo—she has had much pain. And you have a daughter."

"A daughter, eh?"

He did not really know whether to be pleased or disgusted. He turned to Manuelo. "Give me the brat."

She obeyed, and he held it awkwardly in his arms, where it writhed and wailed, and the four-year old Sebastianillo, who had been much perplexed by all this fuss and tumult, now trotted up to stare upon it curiously and disapprovingly.

"What," asked Sebastianillo, "is my sister's name?"

"That is a matter which is decided only on the third day," Lobo told him judicially.

Pépa awoke, hearing their voices, and turned her eyes, now encircled with dark rings, like pencil-smudges, towards her husband. She said wearily, yet with a note of command:

"Give me my baby."

He strolled towards her, holding out the child.

"The next one must be a boy," he teased her.

A faint flickering smile was her answer, but she clasped the baby, laying it close to her heart, seized by the passionate animal love which overwhelmed her always when a new-born child lay in her arms. Sebastianillo, creeping closer, was roughly told to keep away, yet only four years since she had held him just as closely, with an equal pride, an equal devotion. Now he was forgotten, and the corners of his mouth turned down. Like a whipped puppy, he crawled away to his uncle Antonio, who was always kind to him, and told him enchanting stories of smugglers and bandits and bull-fighters.

That night, as is the gypsy custom, the new-born child slept naked, without covering of any kind. In the morning, Pépa, active once more, again and again begged Lobo to choose a name for his daughter. He told her he was too busy, and he lay on his stomach sharpening his knife, half asleep, for even in the forest the sun was hot. The next day he relented, and repeated at intervals during the morning:—"Dolores. . . . Juana. . . . Mariposa. . . . Clara. . . . Camila. . . ."

"Camila," she said at last.

"So be it."

"How beautiful my daughter is!" she murmured to herself, pressing her dark cheek against the child.

Gypsy children are named when they are three days old, and Lobo, who had forgotten of late that he was an outcast, was once more reminded unpleasantly of his sin again *leis prala*, the law of the Romany people. Gypsy babies are usually named by the chief of their father's tribe, and José el Crallis, head of the Seville Calés, had officiated at the naming both of Manuela and Sebastianillo. Now there was no one to perform these rites over the infant Camila, no one except her father, Lobo the Wolf, the renegade, the pariah of the gypsies. Yet she had to be named. And so, on the third day, the elder children were sent out into the forest to gather certain herbs, from which was ground a thick juice or paste, with which the body of the baby was anointed; some of these herbs would make her impervious to heat, others to cold, others to sickness. Then Lobo kindled a tiny fire of fir-cones, and, grasping his daughter in one hand, held her suspended over the drifting thick blue smoke, while he pronounced loudly above her head the one word: "Camila." Then he and Antonio trampled down the baptismal fire, until nothing was left but a small smoking black patch upon the ground. Then, since the day was plainly an occasion for festivity, they next proceeded to drink several bottles of red wine, which Manuela had that morning been sent to fetch from a disreputable ditch-tavern about five miles away. They had invited to this debauch their one friend, a Basque gypsy named Jeanneton, a Caló who, living alone by petty thieving, had as yet heard nothing of the ban pronounced upon Lobo.

Jeanneton, a leathery, dried-up individual of fifty, with bowed legs like a jockey, hailed from Cibour, where there lived in those days a colony of gypsy people who have long since intermarried with the Basques. He spoke the Romany language haltingly, mixing with it outlandish Basque

words ; he could play neither the guitar nor the fiddle, and was regarded with contempt by Lobo, who accepted him merely because he was, when all was said and done, a gypsy, and Lobo occasionally craved company other than that of Antonio and Pépa.

Therefore, to celebrate the naming of Camila, they all, the children included, drank more wine than was good for them, passing instantly from brooding melancholy into one of those fits of wild and ribald and almost ferocious gaiety for which the gypsies are remarkable. There was singing, playing, dancing of the lascivious *romáls* and *tanana*, and the recitation to music, by Antonio, of various indecent ditties, at which the company laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks and they rolled hysterically upon the ground. Even Pépa, temporarily forgetting her young child, allowed it to kick, naked and neglected, upon the pine-needles, while she entertained the company with her wildest songs. The mirth and melody of this spontaneous gypsy feast reverberated for more than two hours through the dark and gloomy forest. Then, all at once, it subsided. The children, already tipsy, quite suddenly fell asleep. Pépa, her jet-black locks streaming about her face, abruptly stopped her singing, went furtively towards her child, picked it up, fondled it, and crept away to her couch of pine-boughs. Antonio, his guitar dropping from his fingers, began to snore drunkenly. Jeanneton remained talking to Lobo in broken Romany.

“ You go to gypsy festival next May ? ”

“ Perhaps ; I don’t know. You mean the great festival on the Camargue ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Where is it, the Camargue ? ”

“ The festival is at Stes. Maries, village on the Camargue plains near to Arles. Fine sight. Much gypsies come from all over world. Much *flamenco*, much music. Last year Ardaix and Biédart ” (mentioning two famous Basque gypsy bandits) “ go there and stay away long time.”

Lobo mused.

"Where are Ardaix and Biédart now?"

"Round about forest. Help smuggle mules, horses from Spain here. Lead bands of Caló robbers. Great chief men of Basque gypsies."

"I'd like to talk with them," said Lobo, half-drunk and suddenly imperious. "Tell them the Wolf from Seville is here in the forest, a great robber, a bandit, a Caló who has made a name for himself in Andalusia."

"Good. I tell them, when next I see. Now I go back to Cibour."

He rose unsteadily, hiccoughing, grinning stupidly at his brethren from Spain. A crackling of his feet upon the pine-needles, and then in a moment he was gone, engulfed in the midnight blackness of the trees. Lobo brooded over the dying fire.

To join these brigands, Ardaix and Biédart, to lead robber-bands over the passes of the Pyrenees, to muster whole armies of vagabond followers here in the forest, to plunder and loot and carouse with these Romanies from France—perhaps in the end to become a greater man even than they—a king of the bandits, one whose name made the townsfolk shudder! Why not? he reflected; why should they know of his past? And so he planned, until the moon rode high in the heavens and the embers of his fire, sinking lower, died at last, leaving him asleep, his shaggy head on his knees.

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At that precise moment, far away in the town of London, a gentleman seated at his club in a high-backed Queen Anne chair was being accused by his companions of having cheated at hazard. His dice, they affirmed, were loaded. He denied their accusations vehemently, but the sweat stood out in great drops on his forehead, and his face was waxen in the flickering light shed by a sconce of guttering candles upon this tense and strangely cruel scene.

CHAPTER V

The child Camila throve magnificently. Pépa was strangely jealous of her, resenting even that she should be carried by Antonio or embraced by Manuela, and often snatched at a chance of running off with her baby to some secret and bosky thicket, where she would be for hours concealed, fondling and petting the child, calling it by every endearing Romany name, lavishing upon it the same wild unbalanced love that she had formerly, when they were young, poured out upon her other children.

Another month passed, and then, quite suddenly, it was winter, a mild winter, yet one more severe than any these gypsies, bred in the soft air of Andalusia, had ever experienced before. Heavy rain fell, and the night-black arches of the pine-forests rustled eternally beneath a steady drenching downpour that glittered in the dusty half-light like a million silver rods slanting down from the sky. No longer was it possible to sleep in the open, and Lobo was forced to provide shelter for himself and his family by building a rude hut of pine-boughs, while Antonio and the dog Zincalo slept curled together beneath the shelter of the cart. At night there were high winds that tore shrieking down gloomy paths and briary thickets, that tossed the topmost branches of the pine-trees, making them rattle most dismally high up many feet above the gypsies' heads, where, in the summer, stars had danced. After dark, the wolves, so cowardly by day, became bolder, prowling like lean and rapacious ghosts about the fire, which was now, because of their defiance, kept blazing until dawn.

And here, in all this wildness of knotted ink-black trees, of storm and driving rain and bog and mire and tangled

thicket, of skulking wolf-packs, and other shapes, even more menacing—those of thief and bandit and murderer—and curling smoky fires, and the sweet frenzied strumming of a gypsy guitar, the youthful Camila was cradled as all over the world children of her race are cradled, thriving on the primitive conditions of their infancy, growing strong and hardy and untamed as young foxes.

One morning, a grey morning of lavender mist rising amongst the trees amidst the distant moaning of strong winds blowing from the sea, Jeanneton, the Basque gypsy, suddenly appeared from nowhere, as was his custom, beside the fire where Lobo patched, for the hundredth time, his battered and disreputable kettle.

“*Kushti divvus*, brother.”

“Good day to you,” nodded Lobo, intent upon the kettle.

“I come from the chiefs, from Ardaix and Biédart. They like speak with you—now. I take you.”

“Good,” he said briefly, and rose at once, flinging his sheepskin over his shoulder. He whistled as he followed Jeanneton down a swampy flooded ride. He was tired of all this idling, this tinkering of kettles, this sharpening of a knife that was never used. For some weeks now he had craved for action as an addict hungers for drugs—at night, when he should have been sleeping, he had of late lain awake planning lawless and bloody deeds, envying these Basque Romanies, Ardaix and Biédart, because they led bands of wild men, robbing, thieving, roistering and plundering, instead of being condemned, as he was, to the company of a woman, three brats, and a blind man.

Jeanneton trudged on ahead through clouds of sea-grey mist, through which the tall red stems of the pine-trees loomed ghostly and naked. They passed through a clearing, and he paused, touching his companion’s arm.

“Look,” he said.

In front of them was a low round hill, carpeted with heather. On the top of this mound were set three tall posts, like the masts of a ship. From each post dangled

something inert and heavy that twisted drearily to and fro in the sharp wind. A gallows, with three corpses. They moved nearer, staring curiously. The faces of these malefactors were black and rotted away, their bodies limp and shrivelled and mummified, so that they seemed like dummies, hanging from the gibbet, turning and twirling, restless even in death. The eyes, Lobo observed, had been pecked away by crows.

"They dance, eh?" remarked Jeanneton, much amused.

"Yes. Who were they? Bandits?"

"No. They rob churches, kill priest, gypsy fellows, no good like Ardaix. He is great man."

They passed through the clearing, leaving behind them the gibbet, which was soon swallowed by the mist, but for some time they could hear the creaking of the chains that served as music for this dance of death. They walked for about a mile, then entered another clearing, where Lobo perceived a group of men who lolled on the ground, smoking and gossiping. Jeanneton whispered:

"There—Ardaix little man. Biédart, fat."

The bandit leaders sat cross-legged upon their sheepskins, talking in low tones to one another, surrounded by three or four ragged rascals, who kept a respectful distance away from them. Both were obvious gypsies. Ardaix was a little, undersized, wiry fellow with a patch over his eye and sharp sallow features; Biédart, his companion and rival, a large heavy man with hulking shoulders, a pot-belly, and a bushy beard that hung over his chest.

Jeanneton approached obsequiously.

"Here is Lobo, the Wolf from Seville."

"Good-day, brothers," said Lobo impudently, advancing with a swagger, determined not to be patronised by these Basque Calés.

Ardaix replied, in a harsh but not unpleasing voice. He spoke fluent Romany.

"How long have you been here in our land?"

"About three months."

"Is it true that you come from Triana?"

"It is true."

Here Biédart intervened. He also spoke fluently, but slowly, choosing his words with care, as though the Basque tongue were more familiar to him.

"Is it true also that you fled because you have killed a blood-brother?"

"That I cannot discuss with the Basques," answered Lobo with all the impertinence he could muster. "If it were so, it would be an affair between the Calés of Spain and myself."

Ardaix replied, squinting horribly:

"Gypsy news travels quickly. And here, in this country, we hold to *leis prala*, the law of the Romanies, as strongly as do your people from Andalusia. We hear you killed a brother, a picador from Ronda, and that you were outlawed by your chief."

"Even if this were true, what of it?"

"Just this," said Ardaix, spitting: "We want no outcast Calés here in our land, in our forest. Those of Spain, who turned you out, are brothers. The picador you killed was a brother, and his friends are our friends. And so, if you wish to keep a whole skin, you, your woman, and your brats, you would do well to leave the country of the Basques—before sunrise to-morrow."

Lobo controlled his fury only by an effort.

"I came to-day, Ardaix, to offer you my knife and my services. In Triana they would have thought you fortunate to have the Wolf fighting at your side."

The large Biédart intervened once more.

"We are not in need of the knives of outcasts. In this country we can fight our own battles, as you shall see if you are still here by sunrise to-morrow."

Cursed Basques! Without another word Lobo turned on his heel, defeated. And even the despised Jeanneton now watched him sullenly, with hard and sneering eyes.

Back in the forest, he raged like a madman. He plunged blindly into swamps and undergrowth, his face distorted, swearing ferociously beneath his breath, running his fingers over the blade of his knife until they were red with blood. These Basques—how he hated them, how he longed to see Ardaix and Biédart strung up on a gibbet, like the corpses he had passed, rotted, shrivelled, preyed upon by birds, whirling in the wind, while their chains creaked and their dried fingers dropped off !

He remained for several hours in the wildest of moods, furious, raving, impotent. Then, when he was calmer, and incidentally hungry, he returned to his camp, where Pépa glanced apprehensively at his black face.

“Stop suckling that child,” he ordered ; “go instead and pack your things in the cart—you, too, Antonio. We leave at once—I’ve lingered long enough in this cursed forest.”

They hurried to obey him, fearful of exciting his rage, stuffing their pots and kettles and bedding into clumsy bundles, dragging the mules towards the cart by their forelocks, stamping on the fire, pulling the harness from the branches of the trees, where it had rusted all the winter, running hither and thither, while the dog joyously barked and Lobo watched them sardonically. Egypt once more in flight !

In a quarter of an hour they were on the road.

“Bayonne,” said Lobo briefly.

“And afterwards ? ” asked Pépa, greatly daring.

“Afterwards ? God knows.”

She guessed what had happened and sighed as she gathered the child in her arms, easing its weight as she walked at the head of the mules. This would be their life for ever, driven on, insulted, not only by the Busnés but by the Calés, and she had been happy there in the forest with Camila, and would have been glad to stay at least until the spring came again. The cart crawled bumping down a muddy track bordered by armies of pine-trees that now

seemed to her gaunt and grim, like stern soldiers barring her from the woods and pointing instead to an endless winding road that led God knew where, perhaps to a hangman's noose for all of them. Camila's hands fluttered like moths at her throat, and she bent, kissing them, while at the same time she screamed abuse at Manuela for running among the trees in pursuit of a rabbit.

That night they camped on the fringe of the forest and the next night were outside Bayonne. Lobo was grim and sullen and absorbed, gruff to her, savage to Antonio, and unpleasantly short-tempered with the children.

It was the New Year, and the town of Bayonne was filled with jostling holiday crowds. On her own initiative, Pépa paused to tell *baji*, fortunes, to various couples lingering in the square ; they paid her well, and, grasping her child against her hip, she slipped away well-satisfied in pursuit of the cart, moving deftly amongst the crowd like a tigress slinking through a herd of tabby-cats. One or two paused to stare after the *gitana*, but she received no abuse, as would have been the case in her own country, the Basques being friendly towards the gypsies for the excellent reason that the French hated them. Encouraged, she at once stole the purse of a very voluble old lady in a turban and an auburn wig, escaping long before this theft was discovered.

Even Lobo was pleased with her, when she laid her spoils at his feet. She was, he admitted, a fit wife for a great bandit, and that night she slept in his arms.

The next morning they left Bayonne behind them, bound for some secret destination which Lobo refused to divulge.

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CHAPTER VI

A small baby, which is after all indisputably more backward than a small animal, presumably passes the first few months of its life in a state of atrophy. It drinks, sleeps, and is occasionally sick. It then proceeds to cut teeth and learns for the first time the meaning of the word pain. Later—much later—it really begins to use its eyes and to take pleasure in the sight of various objects—a rattle, a flower, a kitten, a bottle of milk. Camila, naked, fed at the breast, cradled on rags, on old sacks, or on the turf, had, of course, no bottle, no toy, no picture-books. She played instead with her mother's bangles, with the long tails of the patient mules, with bits of stick, or with the lid of the kettle. She was well-behaved, being accustomed to be tossed from the arms of Pépa (which she preferred) to those of Antonio, which were second-best, or those of Sebastianillo, which were much inferior, being bony and reluctant. Sometimes she was put to lie for hours on a nest of rabbit-skins at the bottom of a jolting cart, and when she wailed, no one took the slightest notice, with the result that she very soon ceased to cry and invariably fell peacefully asleep. She was, like most gypsy children, brown as a nut, and she had tiny, well-modelled features and bright black eyes, like the eyes of a robin.

She was not aware of it, but the first months of her life were spent in roaming at leisure through a country unreal, almost theatrical in its lavish and exotic beauty. Here were mountains with snow-capped turrets like faery palaces of cloud, fields of vines, stretching as far as the eye could see, little low houses, sugar-white in the clear winter sunshine, with crumbling roofs of rose-red tiles and bright camellia-bushes thrusting against the narrow windows; mimosa-trees,

gosling-yellow, and later, as the swift spring came, while other lands were locked in ice, radiant silvery clouds of cherry-blossom that mingled with the vivid magenta-pink of gay and strong young almond-trees. And in the distance the Mediterranean, like some vast flowing tapestry woven of the gentians and forget-me-nots that clustered at the foot of the hills.

Lobo had said abruptly, three days after they left Bayonne behind them :

“ We go to the Festival of the Calés at Stes. Maries, near Arles.”

Pépa and Antonio were silent, neither daring to say what both were thinking, which was that the gypsy Fiesta was the one place in the world where an outcast would be most grievously insulted, perhaps beaten away with cudgels, or stoned to death. He added presently, as though he could read their minds :

“ I have no fears ; many thousand Calés come from all over the world—it should be easy to hide from those of Spain amongst the tents of Hungary and Russia. And my father said to me long ago that every true gypsy should go once to Stes. Maries before he dies. And so we go.”

Antonio said, after a pause :

“ I have heard that on the feast day all babies born during the year are held up in the church to see the relics of our saint, Sara, and that this brings them good luck for all their lives.”

“ *Chachipen*, it's true,” Lobo agreed, “ and the little one shall be among the first, although priests and their mummary mean nothing to me, nor to my children. But she shall have her chance.”

And Pépa, well-pleased, picked Camila from off a couch of rabbit-skins, holding her close, obviously delighted by the thought of this privilege that was to be hers.

That beautiful and brilliant spring, spent as it was wandering through sunny valleys, on the banks of rivers, camping in the shadows of great mountains, was a pleasant

time for all the gypsies, save perhaps Antonio. The blind man, to whom these beauties meant nothing, still missed his own country—the communal hut in a poor quarter of Triana, with its earthen floor, its hams and garlic dangling from the ceiling, its goats that lay close beside him like pet dogs, the open fire over which he had been accustomed to cook himself strange tasty foods, the familiar doorstep, upon which he drowsed for hours, fingering his banjo, gossiping with brother Calés in the Andalusian sun that was like fire. There, since he was moving in a tiny and familiar world, his blindness had been but little handicap to him ; here, wandering in strange lands upon an endless road, he lived always in a fearful and eternal night, helpless, dependent, in constant dread of Lobo's sharp tongue. Often he murmured half to himself, as he plodded after the cart, led by Manuela or Sebastianillo :

“ *Ohé, chavés*, oh, my children, I am a foolish, useless, blind old frog, one who would be better left lying in a ditch than following gypsies along the roads of France to the Fiesta of the Camargue. Of what use will the Fiesta be to me, since I cannot see it ? ”

It was only at night that he recovered his self-confidence—at night when his beloved guitar sang in his hands like a live thing, and into his music he put all his weariness, his home-sickness, his restlessness, all that mysterious, instinctive impulse that drove him, blind and feeble as he was, along a road upon which he must never tarry, save for sleep ; so that this music, savage and harsh and sorrowful and flaming with vitality, became vivid and beautiful, the very soul of the gypsy, and even Lobo, strangely moved, would clap him on the back, murmuring “ *Magnificent !* ” And at such times Antonio was happy.

The villages through which they passed seemed calm and sleepy, peaceful at last, resting, perhaps, after the bitter wars that for so long had ravaged even this fair and fertile land. The Eagle, his vast pinions now for ever clipped, languished in exile. Here and there the clatter of a wooden

leg, the sight of a man with an empty sleeve or a patch over his eye, brought back for one moment the memory of a grim Flemish plain ; yet France, in all the freshness of this smiling spring, seemed almost to have forgotten the scars of her many battles, the pride of her great conquests, even, perhaps, her Corsican himself.

Once or twice Antonio asked his sister :

“ Have we not met any other Calés going to the Festival ? ”

“ Not yet,” was her reply.

“ We have been on the road a long time : we should soon be at the Camargue.”

He did not understand that Lobo, with several weeks to spare, had deliberately, desirous of avoiding other gypsies, taken a longer and more indirect route, one that led them past Pau and Pontacq to Mélan and Lombez and Auterive and Alzonne, and by St. Chinian and Aniane towards Nîmes, where they rested some weeks, being early for the festival, which was to take place on the 25th of May. Then, by slow degrees, they wandered down to Arles. They were not tired, having rested so often on the way, and the trip had taken several months. Camila could already sit up, utter strange elfish sounds, and distinguish between the members of her family ; her father she disliked, living in mortal terror of his beard, and of Sebastianillo, who teased her, she was not over fond.

One night, as they rested on a green bank near to a wild and turbulent stream, Manuela, clasping her sister, asked Antonio :

“ What is this feast of the gypsies at Stes. Maries ? Why do gypsies go there every year ? ”

He answered, arms clasped about his knees :


“ Many hundred years ago, after the sweet Jesus was slain by the Busnés of a far away land, the three Maries, the blessed Marie Jacoba, Marie Madeleine, and Marie Salome, fled from the country, setting sail in a boat with their slave, Sara, a gypsy girl. They landed at the fishing-town

of Stes. Maries, now called after them, and Sara, dying there, was buried in the church near by, where she became the special saint of all Calés wandering the roads of all the world. In May is held her feast-day, and that is why the Romany people come then from every country to revere her relics, and to ask her protection for their new-born children, even as your parents will do for Camila."

"My father laughs at such things," said Manuela.

"So do many other gypsies," Antonio told her, "when they are in other lands sitting at night over their campfires. Yet they travel hundreds of miles to Stes. Maries. Why? No one knows, least of all the gypsies. Why, if Lobo laughs, does he tramp half across France for the feast-day of Sara, when he might instead have gone straight to England, as he wanted?"

The seven-year-old Manuela was unable to answer his question. Indeed, he could not answer it himself.



CHAPTER VII

The roaming plains of the Camargue, vast and flat and dusty, dreary grey. Here were shallow sand-dunes and tufts of sea-pinks and clumps of reeds that rippled like flowing water ; here seagulls, wheeling silver-winged above this drabness, mingled their harsh and screaming cries with the wild voices of plover and curlew. A great waste of lost and forgotten land, lapped on one side by the sea, lulled by the sad and moaning voice of the mistral, naked and forlorn save for occasional herds of scraggy cattle grazing the meagre salty turf, and flocks of flamingo, brooding knee-deep in swampy pools, hump-backed and grotesque, straight from the pages of a Japanese faery-tale.

And, in a corner, Stes. Maries, strangely out of place in this bleak wilderness, a rambling sleepy Southern village, with crazy houses of white and cream and ice-pink and lavender and blue.

Usually the dreary plains were deserted by all humanity save herdsmen, cantering sturdy ponies, intent on rounding up their flocks of black bulls or sheep or the scattered white horses of the region. Yet once a year it was as though all the colour and noise and gaiety and music and joyous vitality of the world came trailing over the wistful marshes of the Camargue, laughing, talking, dancing, singing, till the plains seemed spread with a vast bright shawl and it was as though a tremendous clash of cymbals announced the brief and savage festival of the gypsies.

From all four corners of the world they came—from Macedonia and Turkey and Sweden and the Balkans and Andalusia and the country of the Basques ; from the steppes of Russia and the heaths of England and the wildest plains

of Hungary ; from the ravines of Sicily and from the very gates of Paris itself—plodding mules and donkeys, laden rickety carts, barking lousy dogs, men, women, and children, shouting, triumphant, swarthy, and uncouth, vomited forth from all the secret corners of the earth to establish for one breathless moment the mighty nation of the Egyptian people on grey and windswept and colourless plains.

And indeed of what use would colour have been to them, they who brought with them so much, who were so prodigal of vivid, careless, violent beauty ?

Here were faces of the purest bronze, faces of amber and coffee-brown, or olive-dark, or honey-gold, or burnt as is bracken by the suns of summer. And here were streaming blue-black locks, and blazing necklaces of strange barbaric stones, and flaming, flashing scarves of orange and poppy-red and mustard-yellow and violet and magenta and burning blue and green and silver and gold, and bracelets of gems and coins that glittered in the sun like bands of fire, and trailing brilliant petticoats of vermilion and raspberry-pink and cerise and cherry-red. The tawdry screaming finery of the Egyptian people, of hundreds and hundreds of Egyptian people, who stuck flowers and feathers in the harness of their mules and hung garlands of bright sweet-smelling blossom about the necks of their dancing, stark naked, impish children.

In a few hours the plains resembled nothing so much as a gigantic Red Indian settlement, a tent-town in which streets and boulevards were formed by rows and ranks of red and green and yellow wagons leading from crowded colonies of conical-shaped dusty tents, forming squares in which strips of bright carpet were spread, and upon which squatted, smoking their pipes, whole families of laughing, hilarious, dusky people.

Here were the gypsies, rejoicing frankly and merrily in being for once united ; gypsies from Russia, aristocrats of the race, tall, ivory-skinned, and dark-eyed, the women lithe and disdainful and diabolically handsome, richly

dressed in silk shawls, bedizened with flashy jewellery, keeping themselves slightly aloof from their more roistering brethren ; gypsies from Hungary, sad-eyed and dark of face, nursing like babies the violins upon which they played with such fire and melancholy ; the gypsies of Rumania, suspicious of the Hungarians and divided into two classes—the wealthy ones, sleek and tawny, attached to the great Boyars of their country, and the savages, known as the Laeshi, the wildest of all, Ethiopian of skin, with jetty, matted hair and the shy, keen eyes of animals, who clung together timorously, regretful at being lured from their homes, which are always in the deepest thickets ; a few English gypsies, saucy and strapping and afraid of no one, bringing with them a fragrance of heather straight from the English fairgrounds ; gypsies from Turkey, turbaned, black as negroes, filthy, unwashed, and shy as birds ; Spanish *gitanos*, erect as bronze statues, moving gracefully, as though the wind blew them, snapping their fingers to some savage half-forgotten melody, the women seductive, like dusky dancing flowers ; gypsies from Italy, flamboyant, voluptuous, for ever in terror of the evil eye and intent upon bitter obscure feuds with all the world. Gypsies from every secret cranny of Europe, timid or bold, lithe or clumsy, gay or savage, but all dark, dark with a glowing darkness that was not the brand of sun or wind so much as a visible and physical expression of the sombre wildness that burnt like torches in their deepest souls. A people apart, strange and beautiful in their untamed animal arrogance, yet also shy with the fleeting and graceful and dignified shyness of those who have been for many centuries oppressed, possessing also another and even more typical quality—that of being able to ignore, with a sweeping, superb, aloof indifference, those who were not of their blood or of their fellowship.

It was early ; yet already from many tents there ascended like silver threads into the soft and misty air the throbbing notes of many musical instruments—the savage beating

tambourines of Russia and Turkey, the wistful violins of Hungary and Rumania, the low, wicked chuckling of Spanish guitars. Here and there a voice, shrill, nasal, ugly, passionate, and wildly triumphant. Soon the gypsies, divided into the colonies of their adopted lands, would choose their kings for the next year. Then would come the Mass for the repose of the soul of Sara, the parade of the religious images, feasting, dancing, and then, all through the night, music, in honour of the new kings or chieftains.

On the outskirts of the Turkish gypsies, who viewed its arrival with a grave and stoical interest, lay the family of Lobo, camping unostentatiously beneath a flap of sailcloth stretched from the cart to form a rough and makeshift tent. Lobo was nervous, yet concealed his apprehension beneath a strutting swagger; he attempted to talk to his brethren from Turkey, but found them shy, unpractised in the Roman speech, and undeniably suspicious. Why, demanded their black unblinking stare, should these Calés from Spain creep at the outskirts of the Turkish village instead of joining their joyous comrades from Andalusia, who were already beginning the festival by dancing, by leaping and posturing and flinging their apparently boneless bodies into the frankly lascivious movements of the eternal *tanana*? And so the Turkish gypsies, silent and dour and curious, squatting like apes upon their hands, eyed the interlopers blankly, with an unwavering stare, fixing them with eyes that were black and beady, like sloes, and now and then exchanged with one another a swift, triumphant, malevolent glance.

As the morning passed, the various kings were selected, quietly, competently, without extravagant demonstration—that would come later—and then from the adjoining village came the tolling of a bell. It was time for the Mass. Hundreds and hundreds of gypsies filed sedately from their tents and vans. The chatter of low eager voices, the chinking of bangles, the wail, here and there, of a baby.

Lobo had tied a red silk turban about his head, and

although it was warm, flung his sheepskin jauntily over his shoulder. Pépa stuck a sprig of almond-blossom in her sleek black head and bedizened herself with all her cheap jewellery. Over her shoulders she draped a little three-cornered shawl of turquoise-blue. Antonio, who possessed no garments save those which he wore every day, seemed content to be led, ragged as he was, by the excited and posturing Manuela, but the two younger children, who were as usual naked, wore thick garlands of drooping blossom about their necks. Thus arrayed, the family set off to attend the Mass. The little battered fortress church was already crowded with a motionless, impassive, swarthy congregation. Soon there was not even room for a small child, and the mob swelled out of the church doors, on to the steps, out into the street itself. Lobo, who was not easily deterred and who had moreover arrived early, soon thrust his way forward among the thronged benches, Camila in his arms, Sebastianillo on his shoulders, and the others following close behind.

It was bright outside, and the little church, half shrine, half fortress, would have been dark indeed, had it not been for the banks and forests of lighted tapers that blazed and winked before the blackened statue of Sara, staring down upon the tawdry, brilliant scene with something of that same dark gravity with which she was regarded by her kindred.

The Mass began. More candles were distributed among the congregation, and soon each gypsy held in his hand, very solemnly, very correctly, a waxen taper that twinkled like a tiny star, casting a flickering light upon the stolid tawny face above and catching, here and there, a brighter ray from the sparkling tinsel of the altar-cloth. The priest, kneeling, looked in his vestments like a great beetle with wings of silver and gold. The silence of the gypsies was profound.

Soon the Archbishop, a portly figure in purplish-red, rosettes on his shoes, a splendid ruby on his finger, and a

great lolling waxen head like the head of a dropsical effigy, mounted slowly and with dignity into the pulpit, flowing skirts held in his hands, spectacles on the end of his nose.

" *Mes chers bohémiens. . .* "

The gypsies watched him attentively. The majority of the faces were blank, stolid, expressionless as masks ; the faces of Roman people who are no longer alone with their own race and who seem to pull down blinds that the *gajo* may not know of what they are thinking ; here and there a face stood out because it was thrust impudently forward, challenging, sardonic, sceptical, and condescending, and such a face was Lobo's. There was polite silence, and a grave irreproachable respectfulness of demeanour, but there was no sympathy, no softness, nothing approaching simple piety, upon these proud, dark, weatherbeaten faces—only the habitual wildness, partially concealed by an affectation of indifference. It was as though the gypsies secretly refused to part with Sara, even to the Church of Rome itself.

The Archbishop had finished speaking.

Suddenly, like a scene at the play, a little door above the blazing altar flew open to reveal a casket, dark with age, dangling from great ropes that were twisted thickly with roses and sweet-smelling blossom. The sainted relics. The casket descended slowly, turning and twisting, and the solemn immobility of the gypsies came to a sudden end as they thrust forward, pushing, jostling, murmuring amongst themselves, fighting to let their young children touch the sacred wood. Lobo, holding Camila high above his head, pressed forward with a grim determination until he had reached his goal. Laughing now, and triumphant, even teasing the frightened baby, he bore her above the crowd, pushing her towards the casket until her small protesting face was bumped against the holy chest. Then, as he turned, he brushed against a silent figure that seemed to bar his way. Two pairs of eyes met there below the altar, with a sharp questioning glance that was like the clash of swords. It was Juan Moreno, he of Madrid, who had turned

Lobo from his door. For a moment they stared at one another with the black, bitter, devouring gaze of gypsies whose knives are already slipping from their scabbards ; then Lobo turned, still grasping his child, which whimpered, and slunk back to where his family awaited him.

"Come," he said roughly, and they followed him obediently, while an eager group of gypsies filed forward to take the vacant places, scrambling, in their turn, to touch the sacred casket at the altar.

Outside, in the flaming sunshine, Lobo strode unseeing through the knots of chattering gypsy people.

Antonio remarked : "It is not well to go too far away. Soon there will be the procession of images, borne by the new-chosen Caló kings, and then will come the blessing of the sea."

He answered, moodily : "I want no advice from blind men. We are going."

"Back to the plain ?"


"First, to harness the mules. Then away, away from the Calés, who know me, right away. To Paris, England, America. I care not where."

Antonio's disappointment was so profound that he nearly burst into tears. Pépa, wiser, asked briefly :

"Who was it ?"

"Juan Moreno of Madrid."

She sighed and said no more.



CHAPTER VIII

Back to the empty tent-town on the plains, where only donkeys grazed, and dogs scratched away their fleas, and mangy chickens picked at the grass. The poor possessions of the gypsies, safe even from Lobo, since the Calés never steal from one another. Swiftly they packed the tent and harnessed the mules and took once more to the road, jolting away from all the gaiety, the feasting, the colour, and the music. Outcasts. Flying now from a real and vivid peril, since all knew that at some time during the night a Manchegan knife would have been slipped between the ribs of Lobo, to punish him for his impudence in coming, pariah as he was, to the great festival of the gypsy people.

And why had he come? Even he himself had no idea, having blindly and obediently followed an impulse too strong to resist, an impulse that comes at least once in a lifetime to all the Calés of all the world.

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The gypsies took six months to reach Paris. One of the mules died, and they cooked and ate it, being hungry. Some days afterwards it became necessary to replace the animal, and Lobo stole the strong young donkey of a peasant family living near the Loire. Flight once more. If he were caught he would probably be hanged; and he thought, for he was now very melancholy, that he would have been comparatively indifferent to this fate. He was not caught.

The weather changed as they crept northwards, and spring became malevolent, treacherous. Weeks of cold and

stinging rain, of mud and mire and fog and mist. There were few gold coins left now in the merchant's purse.

Once they met a Rumanian gypsy on the road, a scarecrow of a fellow, tramping the world with a wheezy accordion and a bear that followed him meekly on a fragile string, a dusty mountain of brown, grizzled, shaggy fur.

"America?" asked Lobo, as one would have asked for the nearest tavern.

"America?" The Rumanian Caló scratched his unkempt and verminous head. "America?" He was unwilling to confess ignorance upon any point, and he observed at length, with an air of profound sapience: "To go to America, which is across the sea, you must first journey to England."

"That is what I thought."

"First you must go to Paris. At the gates of Montreuil you will find an encampment of tinkers, Cagots, who will let you rest there for the night. They will demand a few francs, and they speak no Caló, being lower than the earthworms, and more stupid. But there you will find lodging. Then you must travel to a seaport that the French call Le Havre. It should be easy to find a cargo-boat that for a few francs will take you across the seas to England."

"And then?"

"In England, there is near the sea, where the boat stops, a great roaming forest, called by the Romans who live there the *Nevi Wesh*. There, for weeks, you may live as Calés should, free and wild, with birds and rabbits to snare."

"And America?"

"America is just round the corner of England," said the Rumanian gypsy, and called to his bear, which had been dozing by the side of the road.

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On the outskirts of Paris the gypsies camped for one night among the nomad Cagots, a cretinous tribe of flaxen, dirty, dwarfish, and inarticulate tinkers. So much did they

dislike these persons that they left the camping-place before dawn the next morning to pass through Paris. The wide and splendid streets of the city were quiet now, and deserted ; the gypsies passed close to where a gross and gouty monarch lolled in a palace more gracefully lovely even than its name ; they had not heard of him, nor he of them.

Camila now was more than a year old, and still fed by her mother, who appeared devoted to her, but who had long ceased to lavish upon her that first ecstatic and almost abnormal adoration. Soon, Pépa thought, I must have another child, a boy, this time, and sometimes she slapped Camila and seemed impatient with her. The child was slight but strong, already tawny with exposure to the sun and the wind, agile, graceful, and exceedingly good-tempered.

Antonio, who had never forgotten his bitter disappointment at being dragged away from the festival of Stes. Maries, had grown more silent and wistful as the months passed by and he was still forced to plod each day along a road that seemed to have no ending. More than ever now he regretted Triana, his rascally friends, his chickens, the swarthy sun, and the *flamenco* music of the taverns. Yet without Pépa and Lobo he would have been lost. Why, he wondered vaguely, should life, which by all gypsy standards was surely meant to be joyous and steeped in sunshine, have become suddenly cold, and sorrowful, forlorn and hard ? As usual, his state of mind reflected itself in his music, which became more plaintive, losing some of its fiery vitality ; Lobo frequently rebuked him :

“I want no more of these wailing *saétas* ; give me *tarantás*, and *malagueñas*, and *bulerías*, and make my blood run faster instead of chilling it.”

The northern part of France seemed bleak enough to these gypsies, who, when they danced and sang for *sous* in the towns and villages through which they passed, found the peasants dour and avaricious, and reluctant enough to

part with pennies. Lobo was furious at the lack of interest shown in their little troupe. He was always saying :

“ If my daughter Manuela were back in Triana, she would be dancing in every tavern, with gold coins thrown to her by *aficionados*, by those who love the Calés.”

And indeed the eight-year-old Manuela, thin and supple and passionate, excelled already at the wild, leaping, wicked dances of her people—in fact, Pépa was at times strangely jealous of her daughter’s skill.


Le Havre.

At first no boat would take the gypsies across the sea to England. They waited a week, a fortnight, three weeks. It was at Le Havre that Camila learned to walk. Then a fishing boat of dubious repute, manned possibly by those who smuggled better than they fished, consented, for a hundred francs, to take the party. A hundred francs ! Lobo paid it grudgingly, selling the young donkey and Pépa’s one expensive bracelet. They climbed with cart and mule aboard a battered, raffish, filthy boat that stank of fish and cheap brandy and garlic and tar. And then what seemed like days of hell. Gypsies are not accustomed to feel ill, and these responded to the upheavals of the ocean with an ill grace, especially Antonio, who became immediately convinced of his impending dissolution.

They were landed secretly—for they had no papers of any kind—on the Hampshire coast in the middle of the night, being rowed ashore by other smugglers in a boat large enough to accommodate the dilapidated cart. The mule, which had detested the voyage with a fervour only equalled by that of Antonio, was tipped off the boat to swim ashore. It disappeared, was supposed to have been drowned, and was subsequently discovered, two hours later, by one of the smugglers, wandering a mile further up the shore. The smuggler, returning triumphant, demanded by signs a reward for capturing the animal. Lobo, drawing his knife, refused to pay. No money changed hands.

In the morning the gypsies had disappeared, swallowed

up by the New Forest as on the Spanish border they had been swallowed up by the pinewoods. They departed gleefully, enchanted at the prospect of discovering a new land. Lobo, in genial mood, regaled them with second-hand information about hiring-fairs and race-courses and boxing-matches. And America, he frequently reminded them, was only round the corner. Swiftly, like sunshine, their natural gaiety returned. And thus they departed, dragging their cart, and disappeared at once amongst the grey flanks of a thousand beech-trees, the tiny Camila running by the side of her tawny wild mother, the dog barking, the one mule straining at the load that comprised their earthly goods.



PART II

THE CHILDREN

CHAPTER IX

On the edge of that vast tract of land that roams for more than two hundred square miles over the western quarter of South Devon and is known as Dartmoor, there had lived since the year 1820, at the Manor House of Colereddy (near Monk's Tor, on the edge of Ringmoor Down), a family whom, after more than three years, the natives of the district still described as "strangers."

A cold, bleak word, this, and one that might have been coined for the family at Colereddy out on the moors of an autumn morning, when the mist rose wet and white from the heath and the air was still, save for the crying of the curlews. In 1820, when the wars were over and done with and the florid Regent had at length ascended to the throne, England, even that England of desolate moor and fen, was cheerful enough in a simple fashion, seeking and finding diversions of a pleasant and unsophisticated nature that changed as the seasons changed and thus contrived to bring always with them a fresh breath of modest novelty. In the summer there was harvesting and a festival at the church, and in May the fiddler came, and there was dancing and hugging and merriment on the green, and then there were fairs, with booths where one saw curious deformities and wrestling and boxing and gingerbread sweetmeats and even spotted wooden horses to ride. And in November there were great bonfires on the commons, and effigies were burnt, and then on winter nights chestnuts were roasted on cottage hearths and fearful tales were whispered of the ghosts found wandering upon the moor, and the more bloodcurdling the stories the better pleased were the simple folk who crouched,

secure and comfortable, before their roaring fires. And then came Christmas with carols and ringers and snowball fights, and then Plough Sunday, when the huge horses were festooned with ribbon and the men blacked their faces and sang a song as old as the moor itself.

But in none of these festivities did the strangers of Colerreddy join. They were "gentlefolk," and in this particular instance their isolation was regarded, on the whole, with indulgence.

But there were other and more pompous diversions from which they remained equally aloof,—a rare Assembly Ball or two, a meet of staghounds, modest dinners given by the local squires, shoots, card-parties, mild gaieties from which married couples returned steadily enough, those who could not afford a carriage hacking home along the pack-horse trails, wives riding pillion behind their husbands. It was a simple society that talked of politics, of the Corn Tax, of the King, who really seemed to have settled down after so much rakishness, of horses they had bred and how welcome it was at last to wear your own hair (the men) and of tatting and Pope Joan and a new recipe for plum-jam and Mrs. Clifford's new bonnet (the women).

But the Lovells, as the strangers of Colerreddy were called, seldom seemed to receive invitations, and, if they did, refused them.

They lived in a tall, narrow, odd-looking Queen Anne house standing some distance away from the village near the great Monk's Tor itself, which concealed an elfin cavern, known as the Pixies' Cave, and was reputed to have once been a haunt of the Hidden or Faery People. The house, with its white porch, was in sad need of repair. It was built of rose-red brick that held bluish lights in the rare sunshine and was surrounded by a small untidy garden, consisting mostly of an overgrown lawn and a copse of lanky fir-trees. Outside was a rough road, and then the moor, for Colerreddy was isolated.

The moor, which roamed like a dark ocean as far as eye

could see, contained here and there, like rude walls of granite, ridges of rock and mountain that rose in tier above tier of sullen tors with rugged crests and strange and vivid names. Here, too, were rolling heathery hills and low thick forests of gorse and broom and hut circles, relics of a prehistoric age, like great beehives carved from blocks of weatherbeaten stone. And here were patches of vivid and brilliant green turf, fens (pronounced "vains" by the moor people) and mires, which were more dangerous, consisting as they did of bubbling, quaking bog concealed by thin, deceptive layers of sodden moss. These were sardonically described as feather-beds, or Dartmoor stables, and were particularly treacherous on days of heavy mist. Winding amongst dark blooming seas of springy heather were tracks, too wild to be called roads, that led to Ditsworthy Warren and Drizzle Combe and Wizard's Tor, where the hut circles were like rings of giant mushrooms. Here ponies ran wild, sturdy and shaggy, with gorse and heather and burrs all tangled in their flowing manes, and here crawled the carriers' tilted carts, and pack-horses, and pedlars, and vagabonds and thieves. But for the most part the moors were desolate, save for plovers, and for coneys and foxes, and sometimes a bittern, and an occasional frieze, against the sky, of fleeting tawny deer. At night, round the dewponds that were slabs of silver in the darkness of the heather, there were scuffling sounds and rustling, as the shyest animals crept there to drink.

In the summer there was a strange and sombre beauty to be found on the moors, for the crimson heather bloomed sweet smelling, and bees clustered above it, and there were darting butterflies, and the thickets of gorse flamed yellow-gold, and even the ragged tors seemed less menacing, and the earth buzzed with the small and busy sounds of creeping things, and the sky, curving in a vast arch, swept down to meet the swimming bluish horizon of the moorland.

But in the winter it rained, not for weeks, but for months at a time, a savage lashing pitiless rain that imprisoned all

the land in a kingdom of hissing steely spears flung bitterly from skies that were perpetually overcast, while the mists, gathering weight from so much moisture, hung thick and heavy, like the greyish fleece of moorland sheep, and made Dartmoor sadder, more forlorn, than any place on earth.

An inhospitable place for strangers.

At first Colerreddy, after its occupation by the Lovells, had been as quiet, as empty as before, but soon, as the weeks passed, Hirons, the carrier, reported that sometimes a man paced the overgrown garden, hands clasped behind his back, and later, when the mist cleared in the early spring, he came to the village telling of children's voices heard calling amongst the fir-trees. Every week a female servant came to the cottage to order food for the denizens of the Manor House. This woman, also a stranger, very straight and stiff in her brown stuff frock, with a shawl about her head, was apparently a Northerner, which probably accounted for the glacial reserve of her manner. She answered most questions with a monosyllable, others not at all. Later, however, she engaged a village girl as an assistant, Mrs. Betts' Lily. Mrs. Betts' Lily, a far more satisfactory conversationalist, reported that the household consisted of master and mistress, three children, and the servant, Prudence. Master she saw seldom, mistress not at all (she appeared to be a poor sick body), and the children constantly. The house was thick with dust (a bad advertisement for Prudence, if you like), some of the living-rooms were shut up, and the children, two boys and a girl, lived mainly in the kitchen, where they plagued her life out, being most unmannerly, especially the elder boy, Harry, who was a rare rogue. Pressed for further details, she admitted that a terrible amount of spirits were consumed, by whom she knew not, that mistress ate no more than a bird, that the house was full of dark, dirty old pictures, and that master ate his meals alone in his study. She concluded by observing that Prudence was enough to give you the creeps and that the house was haunted for certain sure.

In the early summer Mrs. Betts' Lily's brother, Tom, an oaf of fifteen, was engaged to weed the garden, a hopeless task at which he soon ceased to persevere, and to help his sister about the kitchen.

In May was held the annual pony-fair, made remarkable by the attendance thereat of the strange man from Colerreddy, who proceeded to buy, for a negligible sum, two weedy half-broken animals, a shabby saddle, and a couple of aged bridles. It being his first excursion from his own domain, he at once became the object of considerable attention, to which he seemed indifferent, returning homewards directly his business was done. It was observed that he was young, surely not more than thirty-two or thirty-three, that he was a big fine man, dressed in a faded, well-cut coat of plum-colour, that he had a great head, like a bull's, covered with thick mouse-brown hair, that he had bushy eye-brows, and a solid, tanned, good-humoured face, with an arched nose and a curious cleft in the chin. He was at once assumed to be a Great Gentleman, and it was decided by two farmers and four yokels that he was weary to death of the moor and the country-side. Why, then, did he stay, he and his sickly wife and his mischievous children?

A few months later, in the taverns of the moor, it was whispered that Mr. Richard Lovell had been forced to fly from London. Some ugly scandal—duelling, cards, embezzlement. In any case he could not return. The oldest inhabitant of the neighbourhood, casting his mind back, recollected that Colerreddy Manor had not always been empty, that it had, on the contrary, been inhabited in his boyhood by a maiden lady of the name of Lovell. A quaint body, he chuckled over his ale; she had smothered her face with paint even when she was old and raddled and wore a towering wig that forced her to bend almost double when entering her own front door. Furthermore, she had talked to herself, fed the birds, which were always tame with her, and fanned herself like a crazy thing on the coldest

winter days. People had said she was a witch. Richard Lovell was her nephew ; she had apparently bequeathed the Manor House to his father, who had never lived there, and thus it had descended to him.

One November evening, when the rain slashed against the windows of the Magpie Inn, and one or two regular customers sat with their ale by a fire that glowed rose-red and warmed their chilled bones, the door suddenly opened, and Richard Lovell himself, wrapped in a green cloak, walked quite coolly into the room.

He called for grog, and when the landlord, stupefied by this apparition, had mixed his drink, the young man came to sit by the fire, simply and without shyness, smiling pleasantly at the company.

"A bitter night," he said.

They agreed, gaping.

Addressing them with a courtesy which they found highly agreeable, he continued : "I have been riding the moors for three hours past, by Ditsworthy and Drizzle Combe, and had I started forth mother-naked, I could not have been wetter. Tell me—are your Dartmoor winters always thus ?"

Always, they agreed solemnly.

"Then God help me," said Richard Lovell, and watched his steaming boots with a weary eye.

It was not, the landlord ventured, a suitable night for such a fine gentleman to be abroad on the moors.

The young man stared at him thoughtfully, as though this point had not hitherto presented itself. He said at length :

"I must ride abroad, or rot in a study back at Colerreddy. I have tried both and hated both. Another grog, and a drink for yourself, if you will so honour me."

The landlord, apart from other considerations, was only too pleased to honour the stranger from Colerreddy. They sat for some time in silence ; then the landlord questioned :

"You be staying long back yonder, master ?"

"All my life," said Richard Lovell.

There was another silence. A farmer at length observed :

"They do say that the Manor House be terrible damp, along of being empty so many years. And there is talk of rats."

"There might well be," said the owner of the house. He added : "In the winter the walls of my house ooze, and the rats scuffle behind my wainscots, and I am told that the ghost of my aunt Adelaide walks throughout the corridors weeping and with a taper in her hand. A pleasant place. But familiarity, they say, breeds contempt, and indeed I have grown scornful of the damp and of the rats and of Aunt Adelaide, too. But the winter lasts too long. Another grog, if you please."

They watched him drink in silence, his great mouse-coloured head bowed, his face glowing, his eyebrows beetling against the light thrown by the fire. A proper man. Soon he was a little tipsy, and they became less constrained in his company. They asked him for news of London. He scowled, drawing his bushy eyebrows close together :

"I know nothing of London and care less."

Undaunted, they pressed him for further details of his domestic life.


"I have three brats," he said, "that run wild over my house and garden. Three brats and a wife. And my wife's maid, Prudence, that plays mammy to us all."

Their natural good breeding prevented them from pursuing the subject. He obviously desired to avoid his wife as a topic of conversation and relapsed, indeed, into a moody silence, which lasted until he had drunk another grog. Then, a little unsteadily, he rose.

"Good night to you all. I think your grog has saved my life."

And without another word he went ; but after that he came often to the Magpie, seeming to enjoy sitting over the fire while his muddy boots steamed, and talking more freely to ploughboys and vagrant pedlars than he did either to the

landlord or to the more respectable farmers of the neighbourhood. The lower the company, the better he liked it. And soon he ceased to be a curiosity, although he would always be a stranger, and by degrees, when he was rather drunk, he would bawl songs to them, and laugh at nothing until the tears ran down his cheeks, and they forgot what a fine gentleman he was and grew to look upon him as one of themselves—even to pity him, because he was so plainly unhappy. But never, even when he was in his cups, did he reveal his secrets.



CHAPTER X

One morning in early spring, when Mrs. Betts' Lily was cooking her usual rough lunch for the Lovell family, the door of the kitchen softly opened and she became suddenly aware of a strange figure standing there on the threshold regarding her. A lady—obviously the mistress.

The lady was tall, and very slight and thin. She had no colour, but was all black and white, from the peaked ivory of her face to the piled ebony of her hair, and she was dressed in a rich, fantastic high-waisted gown of dirty white satin threaded with gold, a dress surely suited more to a ball than to the damp barn that was Coleruddy. She had enormous, velvety black eyes beneath queer arched eyebrows ; her hands, white as snowdrops, were long and narrow and beautiful, and she seemed so fragile that one could almost see through her ; she was like a lighted candle that one puff must for ever extinguish. The lady said, drawling her words in a languid fretful voice :

" Where is Prudence ? Must I ring until my bell breaks ? I told her this morning that I meant to dress myself. Who are you ? The cook ? You are not a very good cook ; I have known better in my life."

Mrs. Betts' Lily stared in thrilled amazement. She stutted at length that Prudence had gone out by the gate to look for the children, whose dinner was ready.

" Oh," said the lady indifferently, and turned away. " I know of course that the children come first and are accustomed to be put before their mother. . . . Please to send me Prudence when she returns."

She left the kitchen and the damp passage leading from the shuttered dining-room, walking slowly, as though she

were already tired, until she found herself in the drawing-room, shrouded and melancholy, she thought, as though a corpse lay in the house. Abruptly, almost defiantly, Harriet Lovell walked over to the window and pulled the curtains apart. A beam of greyish light pierced the quiet and dusty room, slanting coldly upon delicate spindly French furniture, smothered with gilt, upon a cluster of tall waxen candles thrust in a cunningly wrought Venetian sconce, upon a row of Queen Anne chairs, austere beautiful, backs to the wall, upon glass-topped tables, crammed with pretty rubbish, and a fire-screen that was the spreading tail of a white peacock, and upon the walls, where dark sad portraits, already marred by the damp, stared down at her gravely, wondering, perhaps, at being disturbed after so many months of lonely peace.

A cheerless room. She shuddered, and went towards the window. Outside, on the wet grass that rippled silvery in the wind, beneath the one black handsome cedar-tree that stood proudly amongst the gaunt firs, her children played happily enough, oblivious of the dinner that awaited them. She was the mother of two sons and one daughter. Harry was seven, Evelyn six, and Celia, the baby, not yet five. Three children in as many years ! No wonder, she thought resentfully, that she was always tired and often ailing. She watched them, curiously detached. Harry was tall and strong, dark-skinned, with her black eyes and proud, rather insolent bearing. But he was as rough as an over-grown puppy, and his hands and face were dirty, like a tramp's child. The slender, more delicate-looking younger brother was pretty as a girl, with fair silky hair that curled on his collar, the mouth of an angel, and big grey eyes round which the lashes made black rims. And the girl Celia was charming, too, like a cherub with a rosy face and tawny gold hair and round, unsteady legs. Yet all three children seemed vaguely untidy, unkempt, dingy, and ill-cared for. Harriet continued to watch them with an aloof impersonal scrutiny.

The great window framed her adequately enough, making her seem so thin and fragile that she was less tangible than a snowflake ; more than ever, with her dark hair combed from her forehead, and her sombre hollow eyes too large for her narrow, pointed, colourless face, did she resemble something that was not alive, but carved from ebony and ivory. Now, forgetting the children, she stared out at the grey garden as though she gazed upon a spectre—and so she did, the ghost of London. Once she had lived there with Richard.

She mused, as she had done many times before, upon their life together in the great town, that life that had begun so gaily, so brilliantly, like some radiant firework, only to sizzle out, leaving behind it nothing, not a trace, of all that she had loved so dearly. Born Harriet Vernon, daughter of a Shropshire squire, she had been brought to London for her first season by an aunt who frankly hoped to marry her off.

At first things had seemed easy, for she was merry and spirited enough in those days, although even in her youth sharp-tongued. She had attended balls and fêtes and revels and routs, always, however, without the long hoped for proposal. At first her aunt supposed that Harriet's poverty frightened men away ; then, gradually, to her horror, she came to realise that the girl was a blue-stockings. A shocking discovery ! Her niece liked more to talk of Elizabethan dramatists than of the latest scandal ; she actually preferred reading Voltaire to perusing the pages of *La Belle Assemblée* ! Absurd Harriet ! And July was drawing to a close. . . . The aunt sent for her niece and there ensued one of those bitter, primitive conversations that can only take place between two women. Harriet, departing in a cold rage, was conscious of being a failure.

And then, at a ball, she met Mr. Richard Lovell. He was a mysterious person—one of those curious and moth-like beings now-a-days described as young men about town. He lived in obscure rooms somewhere near the Albany,

gambled heavily at Almack's and other clubs, and danced at night until dawn. He was a handsome, elegantly dressed youth, and he seemed attracted, from the first, by Harriet's pale, graceful charms. They met at another ball, then at a river picnic. By this time she had made up her mind, and was animated by a frosty determination that led her to lure him away from the other guests into the shade of the trees on the river bank. Here they strolled talking. She was very handsome in a gown of goldish maize-colour that made her skin whiter than milk.

They ceased to stroll, but continued to talk.

And then, where the river, argent clear, reflected the swooning green fountains of the acacia trees, Richard Lovell asked Harriet to be his wife, and she accepted him demurely, yet not without a certain mischievous pride. She thought him stupid, but admired his appearance. He was a "proper man," and now her aunt could gibe at her no more. . . . He, for his part, was half in love with her and admired even more than her remote, fragile beauty her keen wit and cool, resourceful brain.

He also, as it happened, thought her richer than she really was. And so they became betrothed.

For the first year, all went well. Then, after Harry was born, they both became more extravagant. There were debts, quarrels, tradesmen battering at the door. Harriet, ardent and ambitious where her husband was concerned, had long ago determined to push him and mould him and make of this handsome lout a successful, wealthy, and envied man. Unfortunately, Richard did not particularly desire to be moulded, and then Evelyn was born and Harriet's plans had to be indefinitely postponed. She was driven to borrowing from the aunt, which infuriated both, and then, by degrees, she made other discoveries concerning Richard which caused even her courage to ebb. She was not a moral woman, but she was conventional, and if she did not fear the Judgment Day, she did fear social ostracism.

Their life together became one of perpetual bickering.

Sometimes, of course, there were reconciliations, as, for instance, when Richard returned home at dawn, a little fuddled, and poured a shower of gold coins over her as she lay in bed all ready to chide him. The result of this pretty gesture was the birth of Celia, and Harriet, never strong, worn out by so much child-bearing, became every day more irritable, more capricious, more disdainful of her husband as a wastrel and a failure.

Richard was easy-going but completely indifferent to her whims. Sometimes he lost his temper, and then, when he would have kissed her and made peace, it was her turn to sulk. Their married life became a weary waste of eternal tantrums. If they agreed on other matters, they were always ready to dispute on one point—Richard's house on Dartmoor, bequeathed to him by his Aunt Adelaide Lovell. Harriet was all for selling it and raising ready money, but he obstinately, stolidly refused, dinning into her, until, exasperated, she clapped her hands over her ears, that it was as well to have a bolt-hole.

And still they danced and supped and gossiped and flirted with their partners, and Harriet had less time for reading Voltaire. Prudence, her mother's faithful maid, tended the children, who were sometimes fed with champagne and pastry by their father and at others shut up all day long in the tiny kitchen with nothing but bread and sugar.

And then one day came the crash.

Richard was discovered cheating at Almack's. He blustered, cursed, denied the charge; but he was asked to resign. It was the end; their gay feverish life was over. Harriet listened to him white-faced; then in a low hoarse voice, her eyes averted, she told him she was done with him—she could never forgive him—if it was her misfortune to be tied to him, never again would she live with him as his wife.

The ruin of the Lovells was swift and complete. Harriet's father agreed to continue her small allowance on condition

that she neither wrote to him nor tried to see him ; Richard had a miserable £200 a year left to him, with the house, by Aunt Adelaide ; they were cut wherever they went in London, and it was conveyed to Richard, from exalted quarters, that it would be better if he left town. And so they went, the two of them, to the " bolt-hole " down in Dartmoor, taking with them the children and the faithful Prudence, and there it was that Richard, still young and ardent, and his ambitious Harriet sat down to rot.

It was she, the more sensitive, who suffered most. She took to her bed and lay for weeks with her face to the wall, motionless, rigid, refusing food, staring indifferently at the rain which slashed her windows.

CHAPTER XI

Sometimes she rose from her bed, and wandering aimlessly across to the dressing-table would sit before her ivory-framed mirror tiring her hair as though for a ball. And then, suddenly forgetful, she would remain there brooding, her chin propped on her hand and one dark tress still hanging, unbound, over her shoulder. If Richard came to her room, as he did but seldom, she would allow him to enter and even let him talk to her, hearing him with indifference, replying sometimes, scarcely knowing that she did, in vague abstracted monosyllables. But at night she locked the door.

And sometimes, having taken to sinister consolations of her own, she would seem animated, would blaze into a white flame of excitement, and, nervous and eager in her speech, would embrace Prudence and fling open her windows and turn feverishly to her books, to her *Henriade*, to the *Pucelle* and *Candide* and *Nanine*, and then to the satires of Pope and the modern Reviews, and, of course, to the latest masterpiece of Lord Byron, whom she had seen at a ball in London, surrounded by adoring women. . . . How pale and handsome and devilish he had looked ! . . . How she would have loved to meet him ! . . . But all that, for her, was long ago.

When she was in one of these moods, she could not read for long, but soon would drop asleep, her head lolling over her book, or would fall into a reverie, gazing with unseeing eyes upon the windswept world outside until darkness came, and the candles were lit, and the low room, with its oak panelling and its fantastic carved ceiling and its high pompous plumed four-poster bed (Aunt Adelaide had loved

ostentation), was shut in, with grave curtains, from all the wildness without.

She ate in her room, wandering about all day in her fur-trimmed dressing-gown, scarcely ever appearing downstairs save when in one of her more restless moods, and venturing out of doors only when the sun shone, which was but rarely. Sometimes she played chess with Prudence, and once, when bored beyond endurance, with Richard, but of course they quarrelled, and she swept the chess-board to the ground, flouncing out of the room to secrete herself once more upstairs. She was not actually ill, only hysterical and under-nourished and nervous and possibly anæmic, but by degrees, as two years passed, she grew to believe that she was an invalid, and Richard believed it too, because it suited him.

Once she had been vivacious enough, but now she was quiet, too quiet; when she spoke, her words were always bitter, and they stung. Save for these occasional flashes of spite, she was aloof, remote, wrapped in a mantle of indifference. Her children meant little to her and she to them. She saw them rarely, and made no pretence of affection—they were plagues, little animals, sly monkeys. They avoided her studiously, and when they spoke to her, it was with the strange elaborate courtesy of older persons. When they talked of her behind her back, which was not often, their young faces grew hard and shrewd. Already Harry and Evelyn understood enough. Sometimes they said, "She hates us," but this was not true; she was no longer really capable of hatred even where Richard was concerned—only of a frozen apathy, as though a cold finger had once touched her, leaving her petrified, sterilised, inert, for ever apart.

Richard, more phlegmatic than his wife, suffered, not so much from hysteria, as from a bleak and hideous boredom that threatened to devour him. A sociable being, he resented his solitary existence, while at the same time grudgingly admitting that he had deserved it. "God," he thought frequently, "what a fool I was!" Too shy to

make acquaintance with his neighbours lest, having heard his story, they might rebuff him, he lay abed every morning until noon, smoking his pipe and yawning, arms crossed behind his head, then dawdled downstairs to a solitary and ill-cooked dinner in his study. Then he saddled his two ponies one after another, and rode them across the moors until they gasped in a white lather of sweat. He had to groom and feed them himself, and this gave him a certain occupation, but at night, supping alone, he was apt to drink too much, and as the months went by, he grew more florid in appearance. Of late, however, he had discovered the Magpie Inn, and now he wandered down there every evening after tea to gossip with ditchers and plough-boys and packmen—people who knew nothing of his history and cared less. Here he found rowdy amusement, and by degrees he grew fond of the moor people, and they of him. But he was bored, sleepy, irritable, like a man in prison. Prudence, of course, disliked him, but the children were fond of him, or would have been, had he taken any pains with them.

Sometimes he rode Harry on his shoulders, or played at bull-baiting with them, or brought them lollipops from the village, and once he gave Celia a rag-doll sold to him by a pedlar at the inn, but sooner or later they would find him too rough, and then one would cry, while he strode off to his study in a pet, no more than a great child himself.

These children, left to be brought up by an overworked Prudence, turned out wild all day long in summer with bread and cheese in their pockets, herded like kittens into the kitchen when it rained, shunned by one parent and teased by the other, grew up, as was to be expected, ill-mannered—impertinent and timid by turn. Harry, the eldest, was bold and wayward, giving, according to Prudence, more trouble than the other two put together, yet he seldom bullied the more babyish Evelyn and treated his little sister with a rough kindness; indeed for hours at a time he made himself her nurse-maid, picking daisies for

her to string while he and his brother, playing pirates, swarmed into the topmost branches of the cedar-tree, calling to her, making faces, while she clapped her hands, delighted by their antics.

The cedar-tree was the object most prized by them at Colerreddy. It was by turn pirate-ship, fortress, coach, and jungle ; they swung for hours in its branches, and, tying ropes from one bough to another, imagined themselves monkeys jumping in the trees of a tropical forest. While Harry was more daring than his brother, he was also less imaginative, and it was Evelyn who devised these games, which included the hold-up, by a masked rider, of a great coach from London, filled with ladies and gentlemen, the taking of a merchantman by Captain Kidd, of whom Richard had told them in a moment of expansion, horse-racing, each one astride a swinging branch, and even a parson (Harry) preaching from one bough, while his clerk (Evelyn) perched a few feet below him on another. Their knowledge of parsons and churches, derived from Prudence, was somewhat fragmentary.


By degrees, the two boys found their way on to the moors. At first they were rather fearful of the vast wasteland they found, as it were, casually roaming at their very door ; then, led by Harry, Evelyn consented to a voyage of discovery. For hours they were lost, but indifferent, being too occupied in smearing themselves with blackberry juice as they snatched the fruit from the bushes growing on either side of them ; they found a stone hut and took it for their castle, resolving to keep it a secret place and return there every day ; then, as dusk came, and with it a fine chilling rain, they became less pleased with themselves and rather doleful ; they wandered until their legs ached, and Evelyn felt that he would disgrace himself by crying. Then, suddenly, when they had abandoned hope, they heard in the distance the drumming of a horse's hooves. For a moment, thinking it to be a highwayman, they clutched one another and trembled, cold and clammy with terror ; then, as the

ghostly figure loomed closer, they recognised their father, riding one of his sturdy moorland ponies.

He was kind to them then, setting them upon the saddle, Harry holding the reins and Evelyn riding pillion while he walked beside them, telling them that they must never come out alone on the moor because of the mists and the rains, and explaining what feather-beds meant, and Dartmoor stables ; but they had little idea of obedience and in a week or so they slipped out once more.

Soon they were always disappearing, and if Richard knew, as it is possible that he did, he did not rebuke them, realising that the sooner they learned to take care of themselves, the better.

It was Celia who suffered by these long absences, since she was now left to the mercies of Mrs. Betts' Lily, an over-driven girl with little time to spare. Once her mother, seeing the child wandering in the passages, took her upstairs, feeling more bored than usual, fed her with comfits and painted her rosy baby's face as though for a ball ; Celia submitted, awestruck, to the queer lady's ministrations, until finally Harriet forgot her and took up some embroidery. Celia played happily enough with the trinkets on her mother's dressing-table ; then, with a child's perversity, she must needs slip and bruise her knee ; her screaming filled the room, and Harriet, exasperated, her nerves on edge, thrust her swiftly outside the door, where Evelyn came at last to comfort her.



CHAPTER XII

One afternoon in early March, Richard Lovell rode homeward from an inn near Drizzle Combe, at which he had been regaling himself. He had drunk heavily, but the fresh air, blowing wild yet cool against his cheek, in some degree restored him. He rode slowly along a narrow winding track with dark, barren, rolling land on either side of him, and the skies, swollen with rain, were low and heavy and slate-grey, and a biting wind whined like a lost soul up and down the naked slopes of withered heather and crushed and flattened bracken. Occasionally he passed a huddle of ragged ponies, and once a great deer, slipping like a dappled shadow over the brow of a hill. He was nearly home, and had indeed reached the great Monk's Tor which conceals the cavern of the Faery People, when a strange adventure befell him.

A man ran out from behind the crag, making no sound as he darted across the track, and caught at the bridle of Richard's pony. An odd fellow he was—thin as a scarecrow and wilder, half-naked in his fluttering rags and burnt swarthy dark, with long black locks that streamed over his sullen, ugly face, hiding his eyes.

Richard felt cheerful, having drunk, and was disposed, indeed, to talk to anyone. He enquired placidly :

“ Robbery, eh ? Robbery on the King's highway ? And may I make so bold as to inform you that two loaded pistols are even now at my saddle ? ”

This was untrue, but he thought it as good an opening as any.

The vagabond muttered, still grasping the bridle :

“ Money. You give me money. Want food.”

"You commend yourself," Richard told him solemnly. "I, too, want money. In my case, it is for the repair of my roof. What are your more immediate needs?"

"Money," repeated the swarthy individual stubbornly, "money for woman. She sick. You give money, see, or I knife."

"If you've got a woman," Richard Lovell observed, "you are more fortunate than I. Where is the lady—I might take her off your hands?"

Sulkily, the Wolf, impressed in spite of himself, took his hands from the bridle and indicated, with a jerk of his head, a rude encampment set up in the shelter of Monk's Tor. Here, beneath a flap of sailcloth, stretched from the wheel of a crazy cart that looked as though it were tied together with string, crouched a party of what Richard recognised as Egyptian people, dark and impassive of face. He stared curiously. A wild sorceress of a woman, obviously big with child, a squat hideous man who stared up at the sky, a dirty, impudent young girl with skinny legs, a sad, black-eyed little boy with no shirt, and a smaller imp of a child, berry-brown, with a frizz of coal-black hair. In the background a gaunt white horse which chewed the heather sadly. A curious and pathetic party.

"Is this the lady who is sick?" Richard demanded menacingly.

Lobo nodded.

"She no sick yet, but soon she have baby, and she hungry. All hungry. Soon maybe kill horse and eat."

Richard scratched his head uncertainly. He said at length:

"In God's name, what possessed you to bring a woman in her condition out on to the moor? You should be shot, or properly drawn and quartered. Why Dartmoor?"

Lobo said flatly:

"America."

"America?" Richard was bewildered.

"Ply-mouth," Pépa now explained in laboured English;

"we go America from Ply-mouth. Long time on moors. Get lost. Hungry."

Hungry? He well believed it, glancing at their lean and skinny bodies, their drawn faces, their enormous hollow eyes. For the first time since his own misfortunes, he encountered beings even more miserable than himself, and he was exhilarated. He said impulsively:

"I live near here. Harness the horse and follow me. I'll feed you, and put you on your way. But make haste."

They lost no time. He sat motionless on his pony, continuing to gaze upon them as though they were beings from another world. Indeed, he had for a moment the idea, being slightly fuddled, that these were elf-people, crept forth from the Pixies' Cave in the tor to lure him into a bog; but with an effort he pulled himself together. Egyptians. They were Egyptians, and he was sorry for them, because they were hungry. The smallest child, too little yet to assist in breaking up the camp, stared at him solemnly.

"Come here, you," he ordered.

It trotted towards him, and with a great laugh he swung it up into the saddle before him. Celia would have whimpered, but this brat chuckled, apparently delighted.

"Your name, miss, if I may make so bold?"

"Camila," shouted Manuela, pushing a great unwieldy package into the cart.

"Camila," he addressed it tipsily, enchanted by its roguishness, its fearless merriment, its fluff of black hair and round unwinking eyes, "well, Camila rides home with me. And now, are you ready?"

And so Richard Lovell rode home to Colerreddy at the head of a gang of gypsies, and the peasants, watching, thought that "foreigners" did mortal queer things. Prudence, braiding her mistress's hair at the window of the oak room, heard a clatter of feet, and, glancing down, beheld this curious procession. She lost no time in informing Harriet of her master's latest vagary.

"Egyptians?" said Harriet listlessly. "I suppose they are the only people who will now associate with him. Let him do as he pleases, so long as he keeps from my room. And now give me my embroidery and don't chatter—my head aches."

Richard led the gypsies to an empty stall in the rough stables, where, among bales of hay and bins of corn, he told them that they might rest for the night.

"But first," he said, unsaddling his pony, "I shall feed you, as I promised; you are my first guests for three long years. Come into the house, and one of you mind the blind man, lest he break his neck on my steps."

In the hall, he shouted for Prudence, who, in response to his call, sidled resentfully down the stairs.

"Tell your mistress," he said, "that there is company to-night, and I would have her eat with me. Then tell the slut in the kitchen to prepare at once for six guests, and send me my daughter—I have here a playmate for her."

Prudence said instantly:

"There is not food enough for six extra people in the house."

He swore, and she realised that he had been drinking.

"Fetch down the hams that are curing in the kitchen, get me the pie I saw this morning, make broth at once, without staying to argue, send up bread and cheese and give me the key of the wine-cellar. Do we have company every night at Coleruddy? And my daughter—don't forget my daughter."

Prudence answered, compressing her lips:

"Missy is asleep."

"Then wake her! Has she so many playfellows? And you people—come with me."

The gypsies followed him into the shrouded drawing-room, where, with elaborate courtesy, he insisted that Pépa should rest on the sofa while he went to forage for wine. Harry and Evelyn, all agog with excitement, came

running into the room, followed by Celia, a sleepy and bewildered figure in a white nightgown. Camila crept from beneath a chair to stare at her, and the two children, the one rosy fair, the other tawny dark, gaped at one another curiously, while Harry, realising with awe that he was in the company of a real bandit, ran up to finger Lobo's knife with every sign of admiration.

Upstairs, an outraged Prudence was delivering Richard's message to his wife. Harriet heard it in ironic silence, her chin cupped on her long hands, seated white and still in the darkness of the room, where the only illumination was a cluster of trembling candles. She said at length :

"Tell him he may seek his companions from the ditches if he pleases—I could not be more indifferent. But I pray they will not scatter too many lice in his Aunt Adelaide's drawing-room, and I will not eat with them, having a sensitive nose."

Downstairs, the agitated Prudence, peering through the door, beheld the gypsies' dusty forms standing quiet and still amongst the litter of gilded knick-knacks that crowded the room. They formed, although there were so few of them, a formidable group, standing there in the candlelight erect and at their ease, and filled, she thought, with a sort of dark, self-confident, sinister boldness which, weary and bedraggled as they were, held more than a hint of *pátronage* where surely there should have been only the most servile respect.

Had she only known it, Lobo, who seldom missed an opportunity, had already, with deft fingers, swiftly filled his pocket from one of the treasure-tables, taking care, too, to arrange the remaining gewgaws carefully, so that there might be seen no traces of his theft. Pépa, exhausted, as she glanced at lacquer screens, and aquamarine brocade, and painted furniture, and jewelled clocks, and sconces of dancing brilliant candles, thought that she must be in a dream, or drugged, or dead ; Antonio, as usual, nearly wept because he was unable to see these splendours, and,

exasperated, nudged the awe-struck Manuela for a description of some of the wonders, while the two small children, staring shyly at the young Lovells, were too tired, too hungry even for any gypsy impudence, and pinched themselves to keep awake. Outside, in the barn of a stable, Lobo's old white horse was feeding greedily off oats and bran; what a pity, Sebastianillo suddenly remarked, that the dog, Zincalo, had died a month ago and thus debarred himself from such a treat!

And then Richard was back once more, hugging dirty cobwebbed bottles to the fine laces of his bosom, hilarious, noisy, like a schoolboy at a treat.

"Supper," he said with a low bow to Pépa, whom he addressed throughout the evening as though she were a queen, "supper is now served."

And the gypsies filed after him into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XIII

THIS gloomy apartment, now aflame with blazing festive lights, revealed a table laden with cold food—the ham, pie, bread and cheese and salad, and even a hunk of cold beef. From a soup-tureen Richard ladled smoking broth and slopped his best sherry into the gypsies' glasses. For a moment they stared, as though dazed, at so much lavishness, then fell on the food in a wolfish and ferocious silence, tearing it apart with strong dark fingers, stuffing it into their mouths, gulping down their wine in a frenzy of almost savage self-indulgence. Richard and the children watched curiously, with an odd sense of embarrassment; never before had they seen starving people feed, and they found it a strange and fearful experience.

Richard, indeed, was too much interested to drink as heavily as he had intended when, in a mad prank, he first decided to bring the gypsies home. For three years he had taken no interest in anything, and he found the sensation stimulating, not to say exciting. These extraordinary people, dark and sulky, wilder than jackdaws, spewed up at his feet by the moor itself, seemed to have taken his fancy from the very first. Eagerly he informed them that his own great-grandmother was supposed to have been a gypsy, that his very name, Lovell, was also the name of a Romany tribe; triumphantly he pushed forward black-browed Harry, standing gaping with his finger in his mouth, declaring that the Egyptian blood would out, and wasn't Harry almost as dark as their own children? Lobo, feeding steadily, wary and self-possessed and strangely aloof, merely nodded agreement and drained another glass of wine.

The gypsies were constrained, as they always were with

those not of their blood, and even when their hunger was satisfied, continued to bear themselves with a fierce, primitive dignity that only served to make them appear more uncouth, more outlandish, more like swarthy elf-people that lived inside the hillocks on the moor and ventured forth but seldom among mortal folk. Had they been alone, their good fortune would long ago have been celebrated by a mad outburst of crazy gypsy merriment.

As it was, Antonio at length produced his guitar, and for the first time in his life Richard Lovell heard the savage *flamenco* music with all its seductive wildness. He sat at first bewildered, disgusted by the shrill, nasal, tuneless singing of Pépa and Manuela. He had taken Celia on one knee and Camila on the other, feeding them alternately with sponge fingers dipped in port, without noticing that Celia had fallen asleep; now, glancing down in the midst of all this pagan din, he observed her unconscious face, like that of a sleepy pink flower, and envied her. On his other knee the gypsy child sat wisely alert, beating time to the music.

Lobo suggested, anxious to repay his hospitality :

“ You like see my girl, Manuela, dance ? ”

“ Very much,” said Richard politely.

The table was swiftly pushed to one side, and the thin, ugly little gypsy girl ran forward like one possessed into the centre of the floor, her mane of hair falling over her eyes. For a moment she paused, half-kneeling, head flung back, fingers snapping crisply, like castanets, then, with a wild effortless bound into the air, she began to dance the *romális*. Richard stared stupidly. The child leaped prodigiously high; she contorted her meagre, supple body as though it were boneless and made of rubber; still snapping her fingers, she flung herself into poses so frankly and temptingly lascivious that at once she was no longer a child but a grown woman, and he felt the warm blood surging over his face and neck as he watched her entice him, feminine, amorous, elusive.

The guitar, now a living thing in Antonio's hands, uttered sounds at once wild and melancholy and passionate and wicked ; the music was like none he had ever heard before, the dancing of the child like none that he had ever seen. Sweating, he thought of witches' Sabbaths, of Satan himself, who might have been prowling out on the moors with these people for aught he knew, of long ugly knives, and of kisses, and of a girl's lithe, thin amber body. The gypsies seemed possessed, and the gypsies were getting into his blood ; he felt younger, joyous and savage, and ready to laugh like a madman at the follies of his own bitter life ; it was as though a great weight, the weight of wasted years, had been flung from him by these grinning gypsies and their devilish music. Prudence, peeping through the key-hole, was crimson with horror ; never before had she seen such a wanton, indecent, disgusting display, and the children were there, eyes agog, and Celia, asleep on her father's knee, no doubt made tipsy, poor lamb, and all cuddled up with that black heathen child—and oh dear, how red in the face the master was, and what shocking goings on for a Christian household !

As suddenly as it had begun, the music ceased, and the dancer stopped too, almost in mid air, ceasing at once to be Circe, the Enchantress, becoming again, most astonishingly, a plain, lanky, sallow vagabond child, who crept beneath the table, like a dog, to finish picking a bone. Richard wiped the sweat from his face.

"What in heaven's name are you doing here, here on Dartmoor ? "

"America," said Lobo again, and shrugged his shoulders.

"America be damned ! Where do you come from ? Hell itself ? "

"Many miles," Lobo told him. "Andalusia, land of Basques, many places."

"Yes, but where from in England ? How came you to be on the moors ? "

Pépa, sitting hunched like a dusky witch, here tried

to explain, as Lobo's English seemed unequal to the demands made upon it by Richard.

"Forest," she said, picking her words with difficulty. "New Forest. But English gypsy in no place let Calés stay. Hampshire—same t'ing. Up North—same t'ing. No place for Caló gypsy. Fiestas, dey throw stones, English gypsy bad fellow. No want odder gypsy. So go America."

Richard gaped still more. In extreme youth, during his father's lifetime, he had been sent on a Grand Tour of Europe, and had boasted of it ever since. But America—he had never known anyone who had been to America, and these strange people talked of it as casually as though it were no further than Drizzle Combe.

He asked helplessly :

"But why America ? "

Lobo explained :

"Place in America name Mexico where sun shine like Andalusia. No cold, no damp. So go there—soon, from Plymouth, in big ship."

Richard suddenly felt unable to cope any longer with the situation. He tried to get up, then remembered the children on his knee. Both were now asleep, and the black head of the gypsy child was pillowed against Celia's shoulder. He asked impetuously :

"Let me, for a jest, keep your brat to-night and put her to bed with mine ? Missy here sees no other of her age, and they would be enchanted in the morning when they awoke to find themselves together."

Pépa nodded indifferently.

"Yes, if you like, Camila stay by little girl."

Chuckling, Richard picked up the children in his arms and strode forth into the hall, shouting for Prudence, who appeared promptly from a passage near by.

"Take these two, and put them in Celia's bed. This monkey keeps her company to-night."

And he thrust the drowsy children into her arms and marched away, as she afterwards explained, before she

could speak her mind. During his absence Pépa had frugally stuffed into the pockets of her family every scrap of food left on the table.

"Come now," he said to her, "and I will light you to your quarters."

He went out before them, bearing in his hand a horn-lantern that shed a rosy glare of light upon the path, and would have offered his arm to Pépa, but she slipped away from him, suddenly suspicious. In the warm stall, fragrant with fresh hay, the gypsies collapsed suddenly, like puppets whose wires are broken, sprawling asleep where they first sank down, on the hay, on the ground, almost beneath the hooves of the thin white horse.

Richard, still in a daze, returned to the house. In the hall he was met by Prudence, standing as for battle, with her arms folded upon her maidenly bosom.

"Madam says she'll have no tinker's brats bedding with her daughter."

"Indeed," he sneered, "my wife becomes at last solicitous for her children? I find this charming. Where is the gypsy now?"

"In the apple-room," Prudence told him triumphantly, "and fast asleep where I laid her, in a cot near the window."

"Oh, well," he grumbled, "let her bide."

And suddenly tired, he climbed slowly upstairs, dropping grease from his candle on every step. There was a thread of light beneath Harriet's door, and he knocked, at first gently, then, as she did not reply, more loudly, and with a certain defiance. But Harriet remained silent as the grave, and, smothering an enormous yawn, he remembered that of course she would have no more to do with him.

"Be damned to you for a sulky bitch," he shouted, after having turned the handle only to find that the door was locked. And then he went creaking and bumping down the dark passage to his own room, but he thought once more of the gypsies—that dark, wolfish man with the squinting eyes

—probably he beat his wife and she loved him for it, bearing him no grudge. And the woman, a strange, gaunt, dusky witch, she was at least alive, and ardent, burning flesh-and-blood, not snow and ice, like Harriet. Damn Harriet !

He fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

In the morning Richard slept late. During the night he had been restless, tossing in a whirl of dreams that flashed with gypsy colour and music, and sometimes gypsy faces had grinned at him from the darkness, unholy, devilish, and leeringly seductive. He stretched himself in his bed, discovering that his head ached and his tongue felt dry. No wonder, he thought; he must indeed have been very drunk to sit at his table feasting with a crew of raggle-taggle Egyptian people from God knows where. And he had given them good wine into the bargain—his best wine. He must have been demented. And even now they camped in his stables.

“I’ll put a stop to that,” he muttered to himself, and searched for his dressing-gown, a relic of Tilney Street, of fine brocade and richly furred. As he slipped it over his lawn nightshirt, he suddenly remembered the dancing of the gypsy girl, the curious effect produced upon him by her demoniac writhings and contortions. And that music—it had streamed forth from the guitar like a smouldering flood of red-hot lava, evilly fascinating and darkly sweet. As he had listened, he recollected, his blood, for so long sluggish, had been stirred profoundly, leaping in his veins, until he had felt young once more, and proud and gay and superbly conscious of his strength. Witchen, undoubtedly, children of the evil one; twenty years ago they would have been ducked and tortured and burnt at the stake by the village people, and very properly, he added to himself.

As he plunged his head into a basin of cold water, he heard outside in the passage a murmur of voices. Opening the door, he peered forth to behold his son Evelyn playing marbles with the gypsy child. He rubbed his hair dry with a

towel and stared at them curiously, amused in spite of himself. They made a singular pair kneeling close together on the floor ; the tawny child clad only in a scanty red shirt, her dark eyes gleaming from beneath the black fringe of her hair, and the pretty boy, with pale-gold curling locks that tumbled on his frilled collar, and his fair girlish complexion that looked always as though his face were painted. Glancing up, Evelyn beheld his father.

" Papa," he cried, eagerly, springing to his feet, " I love this little girl and want her to stay and be my sister. Please to say that we may keep her ? "

" You already have a sister," Richard reminded him. " What would she say if she knew how little you prized her ? "

" Celia has Harry," Evelyn answered promptly.

" Indeed ? "

" Yes, she loves Harry, more, far more, than she loves me. But this little girl—she and I are already friends, and I would rather have her even than a pony of my own."

" Don't plague me at this hour of the morning," Richard rebuked him curtly, and went back inside the room to finish his dressing, while Evelyn's face fell and his mouth began to quiver.

Emerging ten minutes later, Richard found the children still playing together, now joined by Celia, who gazed at their antics with a rapt absorption. Tying his cravat, he watched them with all the patronising affability of a parent who may at any moment lose his temper.

" Come, you," he said at length to the gypsy child, and gathered her beneath his arm like a puppy. Evelyn's face grew scarlet, but he said no more. Celia stared at him reproachfully. Whistling, Richard strode down the passage, with Camila clasped head downwards against his chest. She chuckled, and tried to play with his watch-chain. As they reached the landing, Harriet's door suddenly opened and she appeared before them, slight and straight and absurdly over-dressed in a gown of apple-green taffeta.

"Good morning, my love," said Richard insolently, heaving the child upright against his shoulder, where she stared, bright-eyed as a robin, upon the apparition of this fine and splendid lady.

The fine lady observed tartly, her eyes hard as black diamonds :

"Mr. Lovell, will you at once return this brat to the other verminous tinkers you harbour in your stables, that I may at least walk freely in our own house without stumbling over some drunken beggar or other, lying all filthy and stinking in my drawing-room ? "

Richard was at once irritated.

"A pretty wife, to be sure," he told her rudely, "that locks her door of a night and leaves her husband to take his pleasure as he may, among Egyptians that at least are warm of heart, not frostbitten, as you appear to be, and sour as milk that has been left to curdle in the dairy."

She replied, drawling her words :

"If you lie with gypsy women or not, I am indifferent ; I only ask that my drawing-room may be free of them, not being over-fond of lice and dirt."

She was so cold, so bitter, so disdainful, that his anger rose swiftly in a hot wave. He thought once more of the gypsy music ; of its glowing passion and radiant vitality ; of the girl who had danced like a leaping flame, and of those other faces, smiling wildly at his table, dusky, weather-beaten, secretive and proud ; of the brat beneath his arm, impish, bird-like, precociously wise for its years ; Harriet's face, a white and scornful mask, suddenly made him long to strike it, to smash from it for ever that cool air of superiority and contempt.

"For God's sake leave me to mind my own business ! " he flung at her, and thundered down the staircase, gripping Camila so tight that she gasped and made a comical grimace, like that of a little monkey. He marched across his stable-yard and was confronted by Lobo, unclean and villainous of aspect.

"Good morning, gypsy," began Richard defiantly, enraged with all the world.

"Morning," replied Lobo, suave as ever. He jerked his head towards the stable and announced placidly :

"Woman have baby in night. Man-baby. She well, baby well. Put in cart now and go Ply-mouth."

"Good God !" The calm indifference of these gypsies towards pain and sickness and hunger and want still moved him profoundly, perhaps because he had guessed, the night before, how ardently, how passionately, they loved life ; with what a deep and simple animal zest they looked forward to each morning that meant another day. Once more he was conscious of a shamed respect.

"Come see," Lobo invited him.

Inside the stall, on a couch of hay, Pépa lay prone, her eyes dark-ringed, her teeth gleaming white in a smile of triumph. Nestled beneath her shabby red cloak was hidden a brown naked baby, strong and squirming.

Richard watched her awkwardly, in silence. What was there to say to this dark witch of a woman who bore her children so gallantly in the sun and the wind and the snow ? At that moment the little Camila ran forward gaily to see this new baby lying curled by her mother, and, immediately hostile, raising herself quickly, like a snake, Pépa snarled out some sharp command in Romany. Abashed, the child darted to hide behind the tails of Richard's blue coat.

"What's the matter ? " Richard wanted to know.

Antonio, packing a bundle, explained immediately :

"No like big children no more when have baby."

He felt Camila's fingers clinging tightly to his jacket, as though for protection. Impulsively, and with a swift recollection of Harriet's white vindictive face, he burst out :

"Listen a moment, gypsy. My children have taken up with this little one of yours and cried this morning at being parted from her. You've got another mouth to feed now—will you let me keep this mommet here ? "

Silence. Over Lobo's face, over Pépa's, and over the blind

Antonio's crept a dark cunning expression like a shadow. In a second they became intensely wary, crafty as animals. They muttered quickly to one another in their outlandish tongue, yet all the while their gleaming dead-black eyes were fixed on Richard's face, piercingly, as though they would read his soul. He was wilful, and accustomed to have his own way. He repeated stubbornly :

"Will you let me keep her? She'll have plenty to eat here, and a good bed to lie in, and my daughter to romp with, and I'll care for her as though she were mine. And look—I've seven guineas here in my purse—I'll exchange them for the child in fair bargain. Come now, what do you say?"

And he poured the shower of golden coins on to his palm, where they glinted yellow, and Camila, instantly attracted, crept peeping round to stare at them.

Pépa, nursing her child with all the calm aloofness of an animal, now addressed her husband in the Caló tongue.

"Take the money, Lobo, and let the Busnó keep Camila. You have a son to feed now—why trouble with two daughters when there is already Manuela?"

"I know, I know," Lobo told her impatiently, "I only wait to see if the Busnó will offer more gold pieces before I consent."

"He will not," she replied instantly, "he has only the seven there in his purse and will not return to the house for more, being too lazy. With the seven pieces we need not hunger for many weeks, and your son will grow strong and big, as he should. So tell the Busnó you consent, before he changes his mind."

Spitting on the ground and tightening his belt, Lobo said casually in English :

"All right. You give money and keep Camila. She good girl, mebbe she dance like odder girl when big."

Richard laughed.

"God forbid, unless my sons grow into Josephs."

And he poured the seven guineas into the gypsy's dark

palm. Harry was in the yard, sailing a toy boat in a puddle of scummy water ; Richard called to him, and the child came running towards the stable.

"Take this little one," Richard commanded, putting Camila's hand into Harry's, "and go with her to find your brother. Tell him that she is a gift for all of you, with your father's compliments."

Harry and the gypsy child stared gravely at one another. They were alike, being olive-skinned and black-haired, but whereas the girl was light and graceful, like an elf, the boy was sturdy and clumsy, with broad shoulders and a big head. They looked at one another unsmilingly for a long moment ; then Harry said briefly :

"Come along."

And they went, Camila running to keep pace with him, and he striding ahead, his hands buried in his pockets.

"God knows," Richard thought to himself, "what devil's child I may have let loose here in my house," but he did not really care.

He lingered to watch the departure of the gypsies. Pépa and the baby were stowed away upon a couch of straw among bundles of crockery at the bottom of the cart ; the lean white horse was harnessed, and Lobo sat in front to drive, Sebastianillo by his side, while Antonio and Manuela followed behind, carrying more bundles. Lurching, rattling, the cart bumped out of the yard, and the gypsies smiled, pleased, perhaps, because they were taking to the road once more. Richard smiled too, and waved his hand.

"Good fortune in America !" he called after them.

They smiled again, and vanished through the gate.

"And that," thought Richard, "is the last of the gypsies."

He returned to the house, where Evelyn, glowing with delight, flung himself upon his father, kissing and hugging him in a transport of gratitude. Harry, seemingly less pleased, watched them moodily. Prudence appeared, obviously raging.

"Oh, sir, she'll thieve like a magpie and teach Missy to swear and now she must be bathed for fear of vermin and me up to my ears in work and whatever will the mistress say?"

"Be careful, Prue," Richard told her sourly, "lest the gypsy, hearing what you say, may shoot elf bolts, causing you to pine, or else, dancing in your kitchen, may make faery rings appear on the floor and bewitch you, perhaps for ever."

"Such old wives' rubbish!" she snorted, but was for the moment discomposed.

Laughing like a boorish overgrown schoolboy, he ran upstairs and knocked at Harriet's door.

"Come in," she invited him brusquely, and he found her sitting idle on a chair near the window, with a great mirror in her lap, and a hare's foot in her hand, and a tray of unguents and cosmetics and perfumes lying at her feet.

"What do you want?" she demanded, eyeing him with venomous dislike, stiffening as though at the recollection of his association the night before with the Egyptian people.

"Only to tell you, my love," said he, "that I have this morning adopted a gypsy maid, the age of your daughter, to grow up with our children and teach them what you never will—to fend for themselves. Congratulate me, Harriet; this morning I had three children; since our interview on the stairs I have already sired another—out of gypsy spells, black magic, witchcraft, what you will."

And the cold fury blazing from her eyes consoled him for many things, and he savoured, as he watched her, revenge in all its sweetness.

"Another time, madam," he reminded her frigidly, "you will perhaps keep a civil tongue in your head when you address your lord and master, or else, as a punishment, I may be forced to bit you in a scold's bridle. And now, if you wish, you may embrace Camila, for that is the name of my new daughter."

CHAPTER XV

At first the gypsy child, in spite of a bath, was shunned by Prudence and Lily Betts, not so much, perhaps, for fear of vermin as for fear of something infinitely more sinister—the evil eye. Then, as days passed, and the child, dressed in Celia's old frocks, played contentedly enough with the other children, gradually, and by slow degrees, the servants came to take her almost for granted. In a print frock that reached to her ankles, and with her black hair combed, the gypsy seemed tamed, more ordinary, less of a little pagan, and scarcely darker than the swarthy Harry. At first she had slept in the apple-room ; before the end of a fortnight she was sharing Celia's bed, and they were sisters. Soon she could talk English, and before six months had passed the young Lovells seemed to think that she had always lived with them in Colerreddy, and fed with them in the kitchen, and played beneath the dark branches of the cedar-tree. As for Richard, she amused him, being less afraid of him than was Celia, and sharper, too, and brimming over with spirit and mischief, while his own daughter was petulant, and always ready to cry when teased.

Unfortunately, Harriet had from the first conceived for this foundling a stony, vindictive dislike that increased rather than diminished as the weeks passed and everyone else grew fond of the child. Before the arrival of Camila, Celia had been grossly neglected by her mother ; now, to put her above the gypsy, Harriet took notice of Celia, shut her for hours into her room, fashioned for her expensive dresses of silk and taffeta and gauze, curled her hair, painted her lips, and stuffed her with lollipops, until, very often, being greedy, she was sick when she went to bed. When

Prudence ventured to remonstrate, Harriet answered coolly :

" I'll not have a tramp put above my daughter for any whim of Mr. Lovell's, who thinks to plague me by the preference he shows for this Egyptian brat. What is more, Prue, you must see the carrier and send for six yards of peach taffetas next market-day. If the gypsy wears gingham, then I'll have Celia finer, that her nose shall not be out of joint."

Prudence, who was practical, here objected :

" But, madam, she'll rip those flimsy gowns in one romp with Master Harry—there never was such a tomboy, and she should be dressed in homespun, as I told her only this morning."

" Do as I bid you," Harriet retorted, unruffled.

" Very well, since you insist, but there never was such a boy as Master Harry for getting his sister into mischief. Out on the moor they were this morning, and by the look of them had been through every brook and mere and bush——"

" For God's sake don't chatter so," Harriet told her yawning ; " I am not concerned with Harry's romping, only bored to distraction by it and by all that he does, and Evelyn too. But I won't have my daughter outshone by a witch's child and she shall have as many dresses as I please. And now leave me in peace with my book."

Harry, perhaps, was the one who suffered most during Celia's incarcerations in her mother's room. Always, from the first, these children, while playing together amicably enough, had unconsciously divided themselves into two camps—Harry's, which included Celia, and Evelyn's, which counted two members, himself and the gypsy. Now Harry was often enough alone, and when he wished to play quietly with his brother, he found that Evelyn would not be parted from Camila.

" Leave her at once and come with me," the elder would command, stamping his foot. " She is a girl, and too little

to run and climb with us. Hasn't she dolls that she can play with ? ”

But Evelyn, usually docile, was firm enough on this point.

“ I'd rather play with Camila,” was his stubborn and invariable reply, and Harry, glowering, sulking, was forced to wander off by himself, alone, always alone, as he reflected, smouldering with an unchildish anger. And becoming jealous of this gypsy child who had taken his place in his brother's affections, he grew to dislike her and to delight in teasing her. Even when Celia returned to him, she was somehow different, with her frizzed hair, and her powdered face, and her fine gowns of silken gauze that must not be torn or messed when they ran upon the moor or made houses in the gorse-bushes.

Harry was in many ways more Harriet's son than Richard's. Not yet eight years old, he already gave evidence of sullen obstinacy combined with a hot and violent temper. He was undisciplined, having run wild all his life, he was rude and insolent in his manner towards Prudence and Lily Betts, and at this period his one redeeming characteristic appeared to be his rough but kindly affection for his younger sister ; and Prudence often told him that he was fond of Celia only because she admired and obeyed him and treated him like a god. Yet, when Harry chose, as he seldom did, he could exert a careless wheedling charm which at once made him more attractive than the sweet-tempered younger brother, with his soft, confiding feminine ways.

A year passed.

The four children were still completely wild, unable even to read or write. When Prudence, with the freedom of an old and faithful servant, remonstrated acidly enough with Richard, he informed her haughtily, and with a blank face, that he meant to make ploughboys of his sons—of what use was education to them ? Indeed, the conditions of life at Colerreddy were so abnormal that this neglect of the children seemed entirely natural to the inhabitants of the house, and so long as their stomachs were not too empty and their toes

refrained from sticking out of their shoes, no one troubled about them, and they were free to do as they pleased. Richard, leading the life of an oafish recluse, seemed sometimes to have lost the use of his wits, to have become more a vegetable than a man, content if he ate and slept and drank, asking no more than to be left in peace. Harriet, perpetually torn by dark and furious emotions, her nerves raw, her health poor, and her temper capricious, seemed for days at a time a mad woman, sobbing, weeping, scolding, and raving at Prudence, then in a frenzy of strange and sudden affection clasping Celia so close to her bosom that the child began to scream, terrified by this unbridled display of feeling, scratched and bruised by the brooches and jewels flaunted by Harriet, and then was swiftly pushed aside, dismissed as a sulky monkey, not fit for her mother's company.


Colerreddy seemed at times little better than a lunatic asylum, and only the grimly conventional Prudence remained completely normal, rising at seven, retiring to her maidenly chamber between nine and ten ; and Prudence bore with Harriet because years ago, when Harriet was a gay and wilful girl, Prudence had first begun to love her, worshipping her young mistress with an undemonstrative and selfless affection. It was an affection that would endure while she lived, despite countless fits of hysterical rage, for Prudence had never found it easy to love, and having once begun, was unable to stop.

Had Colerreddy been less isolated, the lives of its inhabitants might have become more normal. But the moor, barren and desolate, roaming and raging at its very doors like some vast, hungry, predatory beast, served to make the house more lonely than a lost ship tossing stormbound upon some mighty ocean. It was so powerful, this moor, so little to be denied, that it became before long knit into all their lives. To the children it was the world, and they loved it in all its moods ; to Richard and Harriet it was a prison, and they hated it, but could not escape it, and sometimes, on

wild winter evenings, it seemed to creep closer, so close that it licked round their very windows, and then the wind screamed and the rain rushed in great torrents and strange birds cried outside as they swept past in the air and the thunder, rolling across the stark wasteland, sounded as though the very earth must split in twain and all at Cole-reddy seemed lost and forgotten save for the moor, that drew closer still, pawing at the door.

Those were Harriet's bad nights ; the children were still very young when they first realised that she drank, secretly, and by stealth, in the solitude of her bedroom. This discovery was more frightening, they thought, than Richard's frankly tipsy orgies, when he grew red in the face and roared with laughter, and tossed the little girls up into the air and behaved as though he were years younger than Harry or Evelyn. No, there was nothing frightening in Richard ; all men of his day drank as much or more than he did. But Harriet seemed to them like some evil faery weaving cob-web spells in that dark bedroom of hers. Often, when she had stormed at Prudence so long that the servant, for the sake of peace, had given her what she wanted, they knew that she fell into a stupor and slept for many hours, sometimes (they thought) for many days, as though she were bewitched by one of her own spells and must remain for ever dead but breathing, like the cold princess in the French faery-book.

Once unconscious, Harriet could forget the moor. This, in the winter, became her strongest desire.



CHAPTER XVI

When Harry was nine and Evelyn eight, the local parson came to call upon Richard. It was actually his second visit, but when he had arrived four years ago to pay his respects to the strangers, he had been refused admittance. Now, since he told Prudence that he had come on urgent business connected with the children, Richard consented to see him. The parson, who was fonder of horses than of sermons, which he delivered in a blunt and halting fashion, entered the study with a certain timidity. He had, naturally, heard odd stories about the denizens of Colerreddy—that Lovell was a recluse, who associated only with ploughmen and had been involved years ago in some disgraceful scandal, that the lady of the house,—some said his wife, others his mistress,—was a mad woman, kept under restraint; that the four children, who must obviously be illegitimate since two of them were gypsies, were wild and uncouth and ill-mannered as vagrant Irish brats. Nevertheless, Mr. Timothy O'Shea had a strong sense of duty, and he marched into the study to confront Richard hoping with all his heart that he did not look as nervous as he felt. He was a short, thick-set little man with a round stomach and iron-grey hair and shrewd blue eyes that twinkled behind owlish glasses. His neat but rusty black only served to accentuate the fact that his legs were bowed with much straddling of horses; indeed, he had that moment left an elderly white pony tethered at the gate, where it blew through its nostrils, and stared disapprovingly, as a parson's pony should, at the secretive dust-coated windows of Colerreddy.

Mr. O'Shea found himself confronting a big, heavy, youngish man with a great brown head and a tanned,

reddish, healthy face. This, then, was the mysterious recluse, and a fig for village stories, since at first glance Mr. Richard Lovell resembled a hundred other English country squires of his class and period, with port wine written across his face, and fox-hunting, and little else. So thought Mr. O'Shea, and peered closer, being short-sighted. He then perceived that Richard eyed him defiantly beneath curiously heavy lids, that his mouth was hard shut, as though his teeth were snapped together, that the cleft in his chin was oddly pronounced, giving a bitter look to the lower part of his face, and that, indeed, his whole attitude was of one who, fearing a rebuff, bristles, in self-protection, with suspicious hostility. Mr. O'Shea suddenly remembered where he had seen that glance before. Of course—on the moors, hunting—a great, angry, fearful stag at bay. Richard Lovell, his large head lowered, was not unlike this beast. Meanwhile he opened the conversation, speaking briskly, his hands thrust in his pockets.

"Good day to you, sir. What have my children been about? Breaking your windows with their catapults, or stealing gooseberries from the Rectory garden?"

Mr. O'Shea laughed nervously.

"Neither the one nor the other, sir. I come on a different errand, I assure you, one certainly connected with your sons, but one more pleasant, I trust, than you imagine."

"Here," said Richard, "is a rarity in this house—an armchair with no springs broken. Please be seated. You don't object to my pipe?"

"On the contrary, I'll light mine, if I may."

"The last visitors I had here at Colereddy," Richard observed impulsively, "were a party of Egyptian people, picked up on the moor near Monk's Tor. That was many months ago, so that if my society manners are in any way rusted, you will perhaps understand and be tolerant."

Mr. O'Shea nodded politely. He had, indeed, heard wild stories of these same gypsies, of devil's feasting and witch's music up at Colereddy, feasting and music that had ceased

only with the dawn, but he preferred to pretend that he knew nothing of such pagan happenings. Nor did he wish to discuss the isolation of the Lovell family. He began, clearing his throat :

“ With respect to your two boys, sir——”

Richard interrupted him.

“ I have, however, in my cellar at this moment some very excellent sherry. If you would care to join me in a glass—— ? ”

Mr. O'Shea hesitated only for a moment. Richard, less suspicious now and almost jovial, disappeared at once in search of a bottle. The parson was left alone in the study. He glanced with interest at the rows of books that lined the walls, some of which he recognised as rare and valuable ; at the plain, beautiful Queen Anne furniture and at the heavy blue velvet curtains, dirty, dust-smearred, moth-eaten, and shabby. A strange room, handsome yet neglected, filled somehow with the breath of decay. The room reminded him of its owner.

At that moment the door opened and a young boy marched in. His nankeen trousers were covered with mire and the collar of his frilled shirt was none too clean. His shaggy black hair fell over his eyes and he was dark-skinned, like the gypsies dreaded by Mr. O'Shea, but he held himself straight as an arrow and stared at the visitor with an air of haughty condescension.

“ Is that your horse at the gates ? ” he demanded, gnawing at an apple.

“ It is. And what's your name, young sir ? ”

“ Harry.”

“ You are Mr. Lovell's son ? ”

“ Yes. How many horses have you ? ”

“ Three. The white pony at the gate is old now, and not of much service, but she is a faithful friend, and I would be loth to shoot her while she remains sound.”

“ Have you a gun, then ? ” Harry asked with a sudden quickening of interest.

"I have indeed," Mr. O'Shea replied kindly.

"Lend it to me!" cried Harry impetuously.

"What for? Have you seen a coney in the garden nibbling your plants, or do you want to play at soldiers with your brother?"

"Neither," said Harry impatiently. He added deliberately, and in a stubborn tone of voice: "I want to shoot my mother."

Mr. O'Shea looked bewildered. He took off his spectacles and rubbed them with his silk handkerchief, cogitating meanwhile as to the form in which a reprimand to this young monster might best be couched. He observed at length, not going beyond mild disapproval, since Harry's glare was really disconcerting:

"Can you be serious, my boy? If so, I have never in my life heard a speech more terrible, more heartless. Come now, what put such a wicked idea into your head?"

"I have thought of it for some time," Harry explained. "I hate my mother and she hates me. And to spite me, and above all to spite the gypsy, she takes my sister from me. I want to play with my sister."

"I see that you are unreasonable, as well as mischievous. Haven't you a brother to play with?"

"I had once," Harry told him, "but now, every day, Evelyn runs off with the gypsy on to the moor, and I am left alone. If I go to fetch my sister, my mother slams her door, and bolts it, and calls me bad names. I wish I had a gun."

Mr. O'Shea wisely ignored the latter part of this speech. He enquired, really curious:

"This gypsy of whom you talk, isn't she your sister, then?"

"No!" Harry retorted, "she was bought from the Egyptians by my father. Lily Betts says she is a changeling child that can make the cattle sicken by shooting elf-bolts, and that when she is older, she will make people dwindle in the same way, moulding images of wax."

"Those are old wives' tales, and Lily Betts, whom I know well, is a foolish girl. Surely you don't believe her?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders, bored by the conversation. He asked :

"Are you the parson?"

"I am the Rector of this parish."

"Prudence is chapel, and she says she will not go to your church or bide your popish ways. Will you give me a ride on your horse?"

"Perhaps, one day. Tell me, Harry, can you read or write?"

"I know my letters. But I won't listen to Prudence when she tries to teach me, and my papa says I am to be a plough-boy, so of what use is book-learning?"

At this moment Richard came back with his sherry and two glasses. He appeared displeased to see his son.

"Run away, Harry. Don't you see that papa is busy?"

Harry remained standing in the middle of the room.

"Well, make mamma give Celia to me. Evelyn has Camila—I have no one."

"Go away at once when I tell you."

"I want my sister," Harry grumbled, edging prudently towards the door, "and the parson is going to give me a ride on his horse."

"Get out before I find my hunting-crop."

Harry departed in a rage.

"An imp of Satan," Richard explained, pouring sherry with an unsteady hand. "Sometimes I think these children were born expressly to plague their father."

Mr. O'Shea decided that the time had come to explain his errand. Folding his hands across his round stomach and tilting his spectacles over his nose, he began to speak, forgetting his early embarrassment, while Richard, seated opposite to him with his legs wide apart, gulped his sherry and, without moving, listened apathetically with a vacant stare.

Mr. O'Shea most surprisingly wished to give Harry and Evelyn lessons for two hours every morning. He was further prepared to teach them for a ridiculously trifling sum, rather than watch them grow up illiterate, like the pedlars with whom their father consorted every evening down at the Magpie Inn. He was not, he said, much of a scholar, but he supervised the little dame's school down at the village and he possessed a few books, an elementary history of England, Shakespeare's plays, Lily's Latin grammar, and one or two others, shabby after much use. And he found, to his surprise, that horrified as he had been by young Harry, who had rudely shocked his mild conventionality, he had at the same time taken quite a fancy to the boy.

"Master Harry," he said emphatically, smacking his lips over his sherry, "should turn into a fine lad one of these days. It would be a thousand pities to deny him the chances that are his by right of birth."

"My sons," said Richard thoughtfully, "have nothing to boast about in that respect."

And he smiled sourly. But he drank another glass of sherry and felt more genial, mellowed, perhaps, by this talk with a man who was what he would have called a gentleman. The Magpie ploughboys, as boon companions, were apt to become tedious. Furthermore, it also occurred to Richard that there was something to be said for the absence every morning from his house of the two noisy, romping, mischievous boys. He might, perhaps, have a little peace in the future. And so he consented to educate his sons.

Accompanying Mr. O'Shea into the garden, he discovered that Harry had purloined the white pony and was cantering round the lawn, while Celia ran behind him waving a great leafy branch torn from the hedge. In her rose taffeta dress, with rosettes on her shoes, her blonde hair frizzed on the top of her head, and her round babyish face a mask of powder and carmine, she looked ridiculously

like a dwarfish grown-up lady dressed for a great rout. The other children were apparently still on the moor. Harry, seeing that he was detected, pulled up the pony.

"Damned little horse-thief," said Richard crossly.

"Really, Master Harry, you might have lamed Sally," Mr. O'Shea protested indignantly, "and then indeed I should have lost my temper. However, there seems to be no harm done, so we'll say no more about it."

Richard announced austere-ly :

"Mr. O'Shea is to be your tutor, and Evelyn's. See to it that you treat him civilly."

Harry, who had been sulky enough, grew suddenly radiant.

"What? Is that true, Papa? Is he really to teach us? Are we not to be ploughboys after all?"

"Hold your confounded tongue," Richard told him angrily.

But Harry darted away like a lapwing.

Celia shrieked after him :

"Harry, where are you going? Wait for me, Harry, please wait for me!"

He shouted over his shoulder, without pausing :

"To tell Evelyn on the moor that we are not to be ploughboys," and swiftly vanished through the gate, with Celia, in her fine clothes, in futile pursuit.

"A pretty family," Richard commented.

Mr. O'Shea scrambled on to the back of Sally.

"Perhaps one evening, sir, you'll come and drink a glass of port with me? I can't promise you anything famous, but I have some pleasant vintage wine that I have kept since I came here."

"I am vastly obliged for your invitation," Richard told him with a grand air.

As the parson jogged away down the lane, Harriet, wrapped in her finest Indian shawl, emerged languidly from the hall out on to the lawn.

"Have you turned religious, Mr. Lovell?"

“ The parson has offered to teach your sons, and I have consented.”

“ It would be as well to begin by instructing them in manners. May I ask if the gypsy is also to join the class ? ”

“ You may. She is not.”

“ I am amazed,” Harriet told him silkily.

CHAPTER XVII

Evelyn and Camila had built themselves a house, or rather a hut, which they had tunnelled laboriously in the heart of a clump of gorse-bushes. It was prickly and often damp, but it was secret, and this was, of course, its greatest charm. Now they lay there on their stomachs eating wild strawberries, while above them the great arch of the sky was more vivid than bluebells and the radiant melody of half-a-dozen skylarks rang in their ears. A faint breeze ruffled their hair and fanned their hot faces, which were already stained as with blood from the juice of the berries they were devouring. They were unusually silent, being exquisitely happy.

Evelyn was struck by a sudden idea.

"Camila," he observed, springing up in his excitement, "now that we have a house we can pretend we are married. Do you understand? We can play that we are husband and wife. You shall do the cooking and I will be a pedlar who comes home each night from the moor with money, and we will have supper together, and perhaps light a fire."

"Very well," she replied, enchanted by this suggestion, "and Harry and Celia, if they want, can build a house too, and then it will be like a village, and they will be a husband and wife who live near us."

"No," said Evelyn, frowning.

"Why no?"

"Because they are brother and sister, and brothers and sisters can't marry."

"Why?"

"I don't know why, but I believe they never do, and it would be like a game then instead of real."

"Harry is always angry, too," she agreed after reflection.

"You mustn't say that, Camila," said Evelyn, rebuking her, for he admired his brother.

"But he is," she persisted. "Yesterday he jumped out when I walked in the passage and it was dark, and he said he was a bogey, and that if I told Prudence, he would hit me."

Evelyn was not listening. He strolled out of his hut down the trodden path that led among the gorse-bushes, and she followed him. They stood for a moment quite still, staring out upon their kingdom. Around them for many miles roamed naked rolling land that swept into the distance to melt against the sky, and this ground was thickly carpeted with heather that bloomed wine-dark, scenting the air with honey. Clumps of gorse burned yellow-gold in the distance, and there were sheets of curling bracken, and broom, and tufts of harebells nestling near to the lichen-grey boulders that were scattered everywhere like giant's marbles. Not far away, two ponies, one roan, one dun-coloured, grazed greedily and contentedly, stamping their feet when the flies tormented them, and swishing their long tails, like brushes. Sometimes a cloud raced over the sun, and then a huge shadow swept swiftly, like a vast dark curtain, across the blue-grey expanse of the moor, which, the children thought, looked kind that day, and lazy, like a monster sprawled asleep beneath their feet.

"There's Harry," said Evelyn suddenly, and Camila frowned, taking hold of his coat. They watched him approach panting, long black hair tossed back from his flushed face.

"Hullo, Harry!" called Evelyn, who always seemed pleased to see anyone. Camila said nothing, but Evelyn waited smiling, seemingly unconscious of the hand clinging apprehensively to his jacket.

"What do you think?" shouted Harry, when he was still a hundred yards away from them. Evelyn shouted too.

"This is my house, Harry, and Camila is my wife. I suppose you want a dish of tea?"

"The parson has been to see papa!"

"Parson?" Evelyn once more became inventive. "You can be a parson now, Harry, if you like, and marry us all over again."

But Harry was in no mood for mummary. He flung himself exhausted at their feet.

"We are to do lessons with the parson every morning for two hours, only we two, Evelyn, and the parson will sometimes let us ride his pony, and he has a gun, and his name's Mr. O'Shea, and papa and he drank sherry in the study."

"Lessons?" Evelyn repeated in tones of immense astonishment.

"Yes, blockhead. Just the two of us. Every morning for two hours."

Swiftly, furtively, the other children exchanged a curiously precocious glance, a glance which uttered more plainly than any speech the one word "finished." Their good times were over. They were to be separated.

"Aren't you pleased?" Harry demanded.

"In a way," Evelyn said cautiously.

"Why only in a way?"

"Why may Camila and Celia not come?"

"Because they're girls," Harry replied impatiently. "How can they learn Latin and Greek and how to shoot a gun? All they need to know is to stitch samplers, and Prudence can teach them that, not a parson."

"Who will play with Camila when I am at the parson's?" Evelyn enquired.

"How should I know?"

"You see," Evelyn explained pleasantly, "now that mamma takes Celia to dress her up so fine there is no one, except me, for Camila. And she is still very little—too little to play alone."

Harry's face grew dark. He said brutally:

"Let her go back to the gypsies."

Camila, sitting cross-legged like a small Buddha, listened calmly, with a stony face, to this suggestion. Only her eyes, black and darting, fixed themselves vindictively upon Harry's sprawling figure. Swiftly, cunningly, her fingers reached behind her back for a pebble. Evelyn, however, forestalled her.

"If Camila goes back to the gypsies," he declared passionately, "I shall go with her."

Harry became suddenly furious at the lack of enthusiasm with which his tremendous news had been received. His jealousy of Camila, always active, became at once uncontrollable. Doubling his fists, he sprang to his feet, apparently prepared to attack them both. Then Camila herself interrupted the imminent conflict.

"Look!" she cried excitedly, pointing to the long pool that lay shining in the sun at the foot of the hill nearest to them, "look there! What is it?"

They turned, startled.

Floating on the pool with such tranquillity that it seemed to skim above the water or else to hang in the air, less tangible than a wreath of mist, there loomed, like a pale light, the apparition of a strange and beautiful bird. A great wild swan, straight from the land of faery, gleaming pearly-white as though it were carved from ice and its every feather gemmed with snow, exquisite, radiant, dazzling, and remote. For a moment, while they gazed spellbound, it continued to poise there motionless above the mere; then, as they watched, it rose proudly in the air, its wings great pinions of shining snowdrops, and floated slowly in a sweeping circle above their heads. Wheeling, it turned, and with a gliding swiftness that awed them was rapidly carried away, away, up into the clouds until it became a speck of brightness in the summer air and then was gone, taking with it all beauty and joy and glamour, all that these children had ever known of wild faery delights and elfish loveliness.

The wild swan had gone, and with it the shining heights

of elfland. They were alone on the moor, and although the sun was bright, it seemed to them dark, after the white radiance of the immortals.

For some moments they stood there in a little huddled group, uncertain, dazed. Then Harry, rubbing his eyes, which were still blinking, said shortly to the others, "Let's go home. It must be dinner-time."

And in silence they all walked away from the gorse-bushes towards the house. Somehow it was impossible for them to discuss the Wild Swan. For the first time in their lives they were deeply moved, struck dumb by a vision of unearthly, almost terrifying loveliness. The beauty of the Wild Swan, of this great bird that was not as other birds, had smitten them all three like a ghostly sword of white fire. Never, they thought, not realising how swiftly children of their age forget, would they any of them feel quite the same again now that they possessed this secret, this rare and beautiful and glamorous secret. They approached the house.

Prudence, a grim and elongated figure, stood at the gate shading her eyes with her hand in an attempt to scan the vastness of the moor. When she saw them, she clapped her hands impatiently.

"Late again!" she told them vindictively, "and your dinner's been waiting this twenty minutes. I had a baked apple apiece for you, too, but now you shan't have it, and that's a fact, nor yet the drink of milk I promised you this morning. Let's see, Master Harry, if that will learn you to be in time another day."

They made no reply whatsoever to this outburst, and Prudence, observing their subdued demeanour, which she afterwards described to Lily Betts as "fair daft-struck," decided with a sort of gloomy triumph that they had once more been involved in some outrageous mischief.

"We'll see," she told Harry, "what the parson makes of you. They say he has a birch-rod hid in his study."

But even this gibe failed to rouse the boy.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Rev. Mr. O'Shea inhabited a modern red brick cottage on the outskirts of the sparse and straggling village near to Colerreddy. Here, alone save for an elderly and doting housekeeper, he had for the last seven years set manfully about the business of tending a shy, reserved and superstitious flock. His duties were simple enough. Every Sunday he conducted two services and preached one plain and business-like sermon. He had, too, to "shout" the bans for giggling and bashful couples, afterwards to unite them in matrimony and generally, following an interval astonishingly short, to baptise in his church a red and wriggling mommet of a child. Then there were the old people to visit and cheer, strange creatures these, wrinkled and wizened and hunched before their fires with pipes in their mouths, glad to chat of what they called the old days, when escaped French prisoners roamed the land, and of older days still, when witches were tortured, and scolds ducked, and every gibbet on the moor creaked with sightless, rotting dead. Now, they told Mr. O'Shea, times were better, by which they meant that old people, like themselves, were seldom burnt or drowned or put to sit in the stocks whether the rain poured or the sun scorched, but were left unmolested to weave their simple spells and smoke their pipes in the seclusion of their damp, dirty hovels, with pigs and chickens grubbing on the floor beside them, and 'baccy from the squire at Christmas, and no one had been hanged on the moor since last Lammas. And so they crouched and chuckled and gossiped, or stared for hours at their glowing hearths with all the patient, drowsy apathy of the very old, until one day, sooner or later, they slept too long, and none

could wake them, and then the parson had another brief duty to fulfil, out there in the overgrown churchyard, where poppies mingled with the long lush grass that twined itself about forgotten mossy stones, and where the great yew-tree made a black goblin roof above the narrow gate.

Mr. O'Shea took a certain pride in his plain stone church, where the effigies of crusading squires lay flat and cold and calm, long hands folded on their breasts, long legs crossed proudly to show that they had rallied to combat the infidel not once, but twice ; and one had been three times, yet his face was blank and peaceful, not like the face of a dashing adventurer, but tranquil and vacant as were the faces of the old people who had but seldom stirred from their cottages. The parson polished his brasses himself, being finicky in these matters, and especially loved the harvest festival because it rejoiced his simple heart to gaze upon the stooks of burnished corn decorating his church at such a time, and the piled bright apples, and the swelling marrows, and the clumps of wine-red autumn leaves.

Yet he was happier in his home, being much cosseted by Mrs. Marley, his housekeeper, who made him syllabubs, and blackberry jelly, and plum-duff, and whose elderberry wine was the envy of all the village gossips. He might have felt it necessary to reprove Mrs. Marley, had he known, as he did not, that this excellent woman each night secretly propitiated the faery people by leaving a dish of milk set temptingly upon her kitchen window-sill. And, as Mrs. Marley told her intimates, cats or faeries, the milk was always drunk in the morning, so what was a body to think ?

Always dormant beneath the vague piety of the moor people lay this dark vein of primitive superstition. It was well known that at the Pixies' Cave, near Monk's Tor, elves had more than once been observed on moonlight nights, little green men no bigger than your hand, who danced and chuckled, as hand-in-hand they wreathed themselves about the rocks and stones. And if a man lost himself on the moors

at night and was sucked to his death in a bog, it was at once assumed that the Elf King had, of course, stolen him to tend the horses in the faery stables. In such a community the mysterious isolation of those at Colereddy immediately wove itself into something more sinister than the truth. Richard Lovell was bewitched by the lady of the house, who herself stole out on to the moors at night to dance mother-naked with the cattle round a stone upon which sat one in black who played strange music. And the Egyptian child was a changeling brat of the Hidden People, who played all day with elf-children and could at any time cause faery rings to swirl about her feet by lifting her finger and uttering a wild and evil word. The other children, under this unearthly influence, had become more wicked than fiends, poor young things.

Mr. O'Shea, who realised to some extent the whispered gossip of his ignorant parishioners, always pretended not to know anything about it, lest he should be expected to reprove them when he might be riding out to a meet or planting wallflowers in his strip of garden. But he knew that he caused something of a bombshell when he announced to Mrs. Marley that the young Lovells were coming to him every day in search of education, although it must be admitted that the excellent woman recovered to a certain extent when it was explained to her that the Egyptian was not to be included among the students.

So, on the morning when Harry and Evelyn first arrived at the parson's abode, the windows round about concealed several pairs of peeping and inquisitive eyes. If the owners of these eyes had expected to see devil's children, they were a little disappointed, for Prudence had insisted upon scrubbing the two boys and dressing them in their best clothes, which consisted of plaid trousers and full-skirted coats of bright blue cloth reaching to their knees and plentifully adorned with brass buttons. In these suits even Prudence admitted that they looked proper young gentlemen, and although Harry, with his crop of crow-black hair, his dark

skin, and his bold demeanour, might possibly have been imagined to bring with him a breath of Satan, Mrs. Marley herself found it impossible to resist the charm of Evelyn, whose delicate features and fair flushed skin and curling flaxen hair, finer than floss-silk, made him seem, as usual, rather more like a youthful angel than an exceedingly naughty little boy.

In spite of Evelyn's delightful manners, his placidity and his sweet temper, Mr. O'Shea's favourite was Harry, even though he would at times remain glum and mutinous and grumpy, staring before him, replying only in monosyllables, wrapped in some dark, stubborn, unboyish mood of his own. For the parson discerned almost from the first that Evelyn, who seemed sensitive, was not, while Harry, who masked his feelings beneath an appearance of sulkiness, was in reality, emotional and highly strung. So long as Evelyn had Camila to play with, he was content and asked for nothing else ; but already Harry demanded more, far more, of life than the adoration of Celia, much as he was attached to her, and when he could not get what he wanted, he raged, incapable of comprehending the monstrousness of being denied whatever it was he desired. Harry had character, stormy and wilful although that character might be ; Evelyn, with his equable sunny temper, seemed, by the side of his elder brother, colourless, almost uninteresting. Mr. O'Shea, comparing them always to colts that must be broken, decided that although the younger boy would always be temperate and reliable, the elder had greater possibilities, which would repay infinite patience. And the two struck up a curious friendship.

CHAPTER XIX

Camila was not particularly happy at this period of her life. Celia, who was greedy, now haunted her mother's room in search of candied fruits and other sweetmeats, and so for hours every morning the gypsy wandered solitary about the garden and the moor, wearing rather the aspect of a small Medusa. She was a strange child. Apart from her adoration of Evelyn, she seemed indifferent to everyone else and barely tolerated Celia, her contemporary, whose bed she shared. Already, although she was not yet eight years old, she bore the unmistakable characteristics of her race. She was small for her age and finely made, with little hands and feet ; her skin was honey-dark, her nose straight, and her face narrow and pointed. Furthermore, her thick dusky hair, the curious dead black of her pupils, and a certain wild roguishness of aspect already singled her out among the other children. Her race was obvious in her quick slanting gaze, in the sly, bird-like tilting of her head, and in the smooth swiftness of all her movements. Her gowns of dimity and sprigged print, with their puffed sleeves and neat aprons, looked strange upon her because it was so obvious that she should have been dressed in barbaric rags. She had more strength, more endurance, than Celia, and could walk many miles further than her foster-sister. Already she had learned to rove the moor.

At first she roamed across the moorland bogs and heather fired with a definite quest—she was searching for the Wild Swan. As the months passed by without a trace of the radiant faery bird that had so much delighted her, she lost all hope of seeing it again, and wept sometimes at night to have had a glimpse of such beauty, only for ever to have lost it.

But even to Evelyn she did not talk of the Wild Swan, nor did he ever mention it to her ; it was enough that she had her own exquisite memories of her one enchanted moment.

As the summer waned and the autumn rains lashed the moor like rods of steel flung from a weeping sky, she could wander abroad no longer, but hung about the house like a small forlorn and dusky ghost. Whenever Richard saw her, he was kind to her, and took her upon his knee, pulling her ears and fashioning a comical doll from his handkerchief ; as the sad rainy weeks continued and the boys still spent every day at the Parsonage, she grew fond of him, as one becomes fond of a big, clumsy Newfoundland dog, and called him papa, which at first amused him mightily. She was, however, endowed with all the premature femininity of her race. He soon began to realise that were she a grown woman instead of a child, he could have lived happily enough with her at Colerreddy, and they would have missed Harriet's tantrums not at all. He grew melancholy because he had found her years too late, and now her proximity brought with it strange perplexing thoughts : perhaps one day Harriet would kill herself with drink and nerves and hysterics, and then—later, of course, years later, when she was seventeen or even sixteen—he might marry the gypsy and try once more to capture happiness : he wouldn't, he reflected, be really old, not quite fifty ! And because he was ashamed of such thoughts, he pushed her from him roughly, so that she looked at him reproachfully and for about five minutes he became almost sentimental about her.

Finally, growing lonely as the autumn dragged by in a mist of melancholy, he invited the little girls to dine with him each day in the study. Accustomed to snatching their food haphazard from the kitchen, they accepted gleefully. On the first day of the new regime a typical Colerreddy scene occurred. The children, preceding Richard, ran eagerly to the study, where a cold chicken and a blackberry pie lay ready upon the table. To Richard's surprise, four places

were laid, and Prudence, hovering in the background, explained matters not without triumph.

"Madam is dining downstairs to-day, she bade me tell you."

"Then we'll not wait," said Richard in a surly tone.

They sat down and began to eat. About half-way through the meal Harriet made an astonishing entry. Always unsuitably dressed, she now flaunted herself before their dazed eyes in a gown of bright rose silk with a plume of pink feathers in her ebony hair and three Kashmir shawls draped tastefully about her powdered shoulders.

Richard rose ironically.

"Really, my love, we are unusually honoured. Pray sit opposite to me that I may feast my eyes upon such splendour."

She obeyed, unsmiling, while the children gaped in awed silence. Helping herself to chicken, her eye fell upon Camila and narrowed, like the eye of a serpent.

"Mr. Lovell."

"I am all attention."

"Send the gypsy child back to the kitchen. You take her out of her place by allowing her to eat with her betters."

"Now, Harriet, let's have no disputes. It's seldom enough that you grace my table. Can't you for one day forget your tantrums?"

She answered coldly :

"Then do as I bid you. It isn't much to ask—that you send a tramp's child to eat its dinner in the kitchen."

"All the same, I must refuse. I would have her here ; isn't that enough?"

"Indeed it's not !" and she tossed her head. "Come, Richard, I ask you as a favour. Perhaps I'm over-nice about my company—in my family we were ever so—and indeed I must confess that I don't relish sharing my dinner with vermin plucked from the ditches. So if I ask you——"

He flung at her exasperated :

"No, no, and again no ! Camila, stay where you are,

and you, Harriet, be reasonable. Why, this child is as dear to me as our daughter, indeed I look upon her as such."

She misunderstood him, perhaps deliberately. She rose from the table, trembling, her face a white and stony mask.

"Your daughter ! Then it is true that you once have lain with gypsy women in the hedgerows ! I knew it, I knew it, and yet I would not believe. Oh, God, that I should have come to this !"

He told her wearily :

"I have lain with no gypsy women, either in the hedgerows or in their tents. But if I had, you, madam, since you persistently refuse yourself to me, would not be entirely guiltless in the matter. I am not a monk, nor will I continue to live as one."

She would have interrupted, but he held up his hand for silence.

"Also," he reminded her, "I fancy I remember your once expressing yourself indifferent as to my relations with these same gypsy women. However——"

But now her fury was unleashed, blazing, hysterical, almost epileptic in its raging mania. Under cover of the storm the two children fled from the room. Celia ran, as was her wont, to the kitchen ; Camila, more terrified, since she was actually the cause of this outburst, out of the front door, across the lawn, and on to the moor. Here she wandered, shivering in the tepid autumn sun, roaming where she knew not, across hills of darkly glowing heather and stretches of vivid turf and low jungles of gorse, and through hut-circles, stumbling over roots and pebbles.

At last, when she thought herself far enough from Cole-reddy, she lay down where the heath bloomed thickest, and here she wept, at first in fear, and then, when this fear grew calmer, in rage and anger against the cruel lady of Cole-reddy. At length she was quiet, but still she lay there on her stomach with her face pressed against the honey-sweet bells of the heather, while the sun beat warm upon her neck and above, in the blue arch of the sky, plovers wheeled, and a

lapwing or two, and here and there a raven. But of the Wild Swan there was no sign.

Camila lay on the heather until her grief made her drowsy and then she slept, for how long she did not know. But when she awoke there were clouds in the sky and a cold breath swept the moor, rattling the gorse-bushes and rippling the bracken and heather. She climbed to her feet, brushing leaves and dirt from her gown, and then, on the rough track near by leading to Drizzle Combe, she heard the soft sound of footsteps. She turned quickly, hoping for a shepherd or a herdsman or perhaps a pedlar trudging on to the next village ; anyone with whom to talk, for she was beginning to feel lonely. She saw instead a female of curious aspect.

An old woman, immensely tall, and bony, like a gaunt scarecrow of a man, who wore a patched and ragged cloak of wine-red, a short petticoat, and heavy, man's boots. By far the most singular article of her attire, however, was her hat, which was black and steeple-crowned, and from beneath which streamed wild and long grey hair, like a horse's tail. Her face was dark and weather-beaten, seamed and wrinkled from many years' exposure to the elements, and she carried a staff, upon which she leaned.

Camila stood staring in awe, for this was surely a witch.

The old woman paused, stared too, and then addressed her in a croaking voice.

"And what's my pretty doing out here so far from her mammy ? Is my pretty lost on the moors, eh ?"

The child answered politely, striving to conceal the trembling of her legs :

"No, thank you. I am not lost—my home is near by."

But the old woman drew nearer, staring now with an animal keenness of vision, burning Camila with her bleary eyes that yet missed nothing, absorbed, incredulous. Then suddenly she exploded into a peal of hyena laughter that reverberated across the dells and ravines of the moor.

"*Romany rakli, eh ? Kushti divvus, miri pen, miri rinkeni*

pen, miri gudli pen ! Av with mande, eh, av with tuke's pura bebee to the gav ! "

But this outlandish gibberish tossed so knowingly into her very face, the wild laughter, the witch-like hat, the streaming grey hair, all these combined to produce in Camila's mind a horror far greater than that caused earlier in the day by Harriet's rage. With a scream she turned and fled in the direction of Colerreddy, running madly like a deer, leaping brooks and streams, losing a shoe in the bog and pausing not for one second, straining, panting, while behind her the old woman laughed still louder, screeching gibberish until mercifully she was out of earshot, and Colerreddy loomed near.

There stood Evelyn, who had just returned and was looking for her, lounging at the gate with his hands in his pockets. With a sob she flung herself against him, hanging on to his arm, her heart thumping, her feet muddy, her black hair hanging in elf locks over her face.

"What's frightened you?" he asked amiably enough, and bounced his new ball. "Was it a goblin out there on the moor, or only a band of smugglers?"

But she was unable to tell him.

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CHAPTER XX

Camila's unfortunate day made an indelible impression upon her mind. She dreamed at night of these two horrifying females who had both of them, in so short a space of time, done so much to disturb her ; the one white-faced, like a wicked mask, all flaunting in pink satin and rose-coloured plumes, the other enormous, straddling, witch-like and weather-beaten, with her wild grey hair and deep hoarse voice. Of the two, the gypsy terrified her the more, for Harriet, with her petulance and her feathers and her nagging tongue, was, after all, a part of Coleruddy, and one had become more or less accustomed to her constant rages and tantrums.

But the gypsy grew to be the bogey of Camila's childhood. She knew, of course, that she herself came of these dark people, for Evelyn had described to her every detail of her adoption by the Lovell family, but she had hitherto imagined the Romany people as kindly, brown-faced, soft of speech and always ready to smile and laugh. Now, however, this swarthy, raddled giantess encountered on the moors came to be typical of every gypsy in every part of the world ; she shrank in horror from any mention of the Egyptian people of whom she had once so loved to talk with Evelyn ; over and over again, lying wakeful by Celia's side, she cowered at the memory of this terrible woman's instant recognition of her as a member of her race ; when at last she slept, it was to dream of the woman, magnified by nightmare into a towering shape taller than any oak-tree, that chased her vindictively, petticoats kilted, grey hair streaming in the wind, pursuing her relentlessly over hill and dale, while she screamed gibberish and laughed

like a maniac, and Camila, stumbling, called on the Wild Swan to save her, and the Wild Swan never came.

And so she grew to hate the gypsies with a fierce intensity unnatural in a child. Once Evelyn, weaving his faery-tales, had told her that they would run away together to find her tribe, which of course they would do almost immediately, and then the gypsies would embrace them, and make them king and queen, putting wreaths on their heads, and bulrush sceptres into their hands, and there would be much feasting and dancing. But now she would never let him tell this story, and he was sorry, for he had considered it one of his finest creative efforts.

Two years passed, and Richard consented to send the little girls into the village twice a week to attend the dame's school. Here, in the sanded kitchen of a brisk rosy-faced body named Mrs. Clutterbuck, in the company of a dozen tongue-tied peasant children from the cottages near by, they learned to read the Bible and write copybooks, and were taught plain sewing.

Celia, at nine, was a tall, graceful child with curling chestnut hair and a fair skin and the pretty, petulant profile of a faery-tale princess. She was quiet, reserved, secretive and untruthful. She was inclined to be imperious, and, encouraged by her mother, enjoyed bullying Camila. To save trouble, the gypsy, who was good-natured, generally consented to fetch her shoes, or brush her hair, or lace her bodice, but actually, although they seldom quarrelled, they were not fond of one another. Celia was already contemptuous of her home.

"When I am older," she would say scornfully, "I shall leave Coleruddy and go somewhere where I may wear pretty gowns, and go to balls, and meet fine gentlemen who'll ask me to go riding with them."

She and Harry were still friends, but with Evelyn she bickered, because he always took Camila's part in any dispute. She was fond of her books and diligent, but she despised the village children and would not play with them,

saying that they were dirty and rough. Yet with Harry she still ran wild on the moor and romped, and tore her gown, and played the hoyden.

And then Richard astonished them all by going to London for three weeks, on business, he said, but in reality because he felt that he must have a change of scenery or die. And so he went, dressed in his best and smartly cloaked, to catch the coach, and wandered about St. James's and Piccadilly and the Mall like a ghost, a ghost that no one would let inside his door. Harriet took the news of his departure quietly ; her health, she said, was too bad to permit of her accompanying him, but he might bring her back a fairing, and a fashion-book or two, and some gossip of the people they once had known.


She then proceeded to rule Colerreddy with an iron hand. She dined downstairs every day in a turban of silver gauze, permitting the boys and Celia to share her meals, but invariably dismissing Camila to the kitchen. She ordered fantastic meals of seven courses, and, when they appeared, sent them back to Lily Betts with the comment that they were uneatable. She opened up the drawing-room and sat there with her books, all covered with paint and jewels ; she invited Mr. O'Shea to tea with her, and when he came, which he did because he was fond of Harry and Evelyn, she almost frightened him out of his wits with her frank domestic confidences and her screaming abuse of Prudence, whose business it was to wait upon this ill-assorted party. She bought a green parrot from a showman she had heard of at the local hiring-fair, and trained this bird to sit on the arm of her chair while she fed it with sugar, and then, when the sugar was finished, it would flutter squawking about the room, leaving filth wherever it went. And of course she drank, profiting by Richard's absence to defy Prudence. Drunk or sober, she continued to bully Camila with a quiet, persistent, vindictive dislike that once caused Evelyn to throw a stone at her, upon which she ordered Mr. O'Shea to thrash him. The parson, however, was

fortunately the type of man who is unable to thrash anyone, and he contented himself with giving Evelyn a lecture and advising him to comport himself as though unable to sit down when he returned home to his mother's presence.

Even Prudence, who now had everything to attend to, was unable in any way to control her mistress,—she was unable even to prevent Harry and Evelyn from racing their father's ponies every day on the moor when he had expressly forbidden them to ride these animals,—and during the three weeks of Richard's absence the household of Colerreddy became crazier, more eccentric, and more fantastic than anything dreamed in the maddest flights of nightmare. At last he returned, seeming dour and depressed, but with fairings for all—a fine Indian shawl for Harriet (it was, of course, wrong), splendid sashes for the little girls, knives for the boys, and silk mittens for Prudence. He had bought a present, too, for himself, a big showy-looking Irish hunter; he was tired, he said, of riding ponies no bigger than children's donkeys. He also engaged a youth recommended by Mr. O'Shea to groom the horses and work in the gardens. He was sick, he declared, of living in a pigsty.

Gradually he took to stealing away from the house for hours at a time. Once all four children stalked him, crawling on their stomachs in the heather, and watched him enter the lonely cottage of a herdsman whose daily work took him many miles away. Inside the cottage the herdsman's wife, a tall handsome woman with black eyes and cheeks like poppies, slid her arm round Richard's neck and kissed him on the mouth as though she had long been hungry for him, and Richard seemed well pleased by her ardour.

The children, accustomed by this time to their parents' eccentricities, made little comment, save to warn Celia not to tell her mother, lest there might be another scene.



CHAPTER XXI

Harriet's father, Mr. Francis Vernon of Shropshire, died in 1830, leaving her the sum of four thousand pounds. It was characteristic of her that, after having talked incessantly of a probable bequest for the last twelve years, she should, once her dreams were realised, have relapsed immediately into one of her most curious fits of apathy and indifference.

"Take it," she said to Richard, "and spend it as you will. For me it comes too late to give me any of those things that once I most desired. If we could blot out the past, we might have a future. But it's too late now. I want no money."

Richard could at first hardly believe his good fortune. At length he departed, for the first time in his existence jubilantly ready to obey his wife. He was prudent, too, in the spending of the money. He bought a small adjacent property, Pinetree Farm, with 200 acres of land and grazing rights on the moor and announced that when the boys were grown up, he would turn them loose there to farm if they could, and starve if they couldn't. In any case he would have done his best for them, and meanwhile the farmer and his wife, an elderly couple named Marsden, were retained as tenants on a twelve years' lease. The property included a little arable land but consisted mostly of pasture, and its sheep appeared to be its most lucrative product, although an orchard of fruit-trees apparently managed every year to pay its way. Pinetree Farm was five miles away from Colerreddy. Richard went again to London, ostensibly on a business trip, but only stayed away ten days, and after his return it was observed in the village that the shepherd's

wife, Jennifer Crowland, sported on Sundays a gold locket and chain. Furthermore, another servant was engaged at Colerreddy, a cook, a real cook this time, who came all the way from Princetown, and Lily Betts immediately found herself transformed into a maid-of-all-work, which humiliation, being a placid creature, she appeared to resent not at all.

Two years passed.

Mr. O'Shea became accustomed to the eccentricities of the Lovell family and dined with them about three times a year. He was still terrified of Harriet, and shook his head whenever the name of Jennifer Crowland was mentioned, but he was fond of the children, and he had a queer sort of liking for Richard, of whom, as a priest, he should certainly have disapproved. Once he brought with him his nephew, Lance Neville, a youth two years older than Harry, a slim, supercilious, dandified boy, who occasionally came to pass a fortnight or three weeks with his uncle on the desolation of the moor. Neither Harry nor Evelyn could endure this young fop, with his sophisticated chatter of his fine home at Bath, and Camila greatly amused them by mimicking him after his departure ; but Celia thought him the most splendid creature she had ever seen, and made a point of unfavourably and audibly comparing her brothers with this young god for some weeks after his departure.

It was during Lance Neville's visit that the circus came to the village for one night. The Lovell children had determined to patronise this entertainment, in spite of their having no money ; and indeed this difficulty was swiftly solved by Harry's slipping into his mother's room while she was heavily asleep and helping himself to one of several guinea-pieces that had lain for months on her dressing-table in a litter of dust and rouge and powder.

The great charm of this excursion was, needless to say, that it had to be concealed from Prudence, whose Nonconformist conscience disapproved bitterly of play-acting in all its forms, and whom years of extravagant unconventionality on the part of Harriet had served to mellow not at all.

They ate their supper as usual in the kitchen, winking and laughing secretly to one another, and then, as the soft September dusk came flowing round the worn red brick walls of the house, they announced casually enough that they were about to take a stroll in the garden before the boys settled down to their studies for the evening. Once out upon the lawn, they ran, and Celia was the first over the five-barred gate out on to the moor. They had a mile to walk and plenty of time in which to walk it, but this did not prevent them from often breaking into a run, so that they were all four hot and dishevelled when they finally reached Monk's Tor.

On the green by the duck-pond were set two battered wagons of the caravan type, both painted green, but chipped, and scratched, and shabby, and here it was that Camila, fearing gypsies, hung behind Evelyn with a clouded face, for she thought that if she saw her old woman of the nightmares again, she would undoubtedly disgrace herself by screaming. Evelyn hastily reassured her, while Harry and Celia, who knew nothing of this secret, shouted to them to hasten. Before the wagons, on the fairest part of the green, was marked, by means of stakes and ropes, a rough-looking ring, round which was set a row of wooden benches. On the more prominent of these benches the young Lovells took their seats with a certain amount of *éclat*, doubtless owing to the marked impression produced upon the showman by Harry's guinea-piece. The showman was an Italian of sorts, spoke broken English and wore huge curled mustachios, dangling earrings, and a red handkerchief draped turban-wise about his head. Camila sought Evelyn's hand, and was graciously permitted, for the boy was much excited, to retain it during the earlier portion of the performance. Meanwhile, the village people gaped even more at the four mysterious children than at the showman, commenting audibly upon the swarthy darkness of Harry and Camila, and upon the fair beauty of Evelyn and Celia, for the Lovells, even after twelve years, were still objects of

interest in Monk's Tor. At length the showman stepped into the ring.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my happée privilege to present for your edification the Garofoli familee of acrobats extraordinary. First, please, Signor and Signorina Garafoli will walk, dance, and perform sensational feats upon the tight-rope."

A boy and a girl of fifteen or sixteen, sallow and puny, dressed in faded red tights with tarnished spangles, now ran forward, kissing their hands to the scanty public around them, and, sharply and cruelly illuminated in the single flaring naphtha light, climbed precariously upon the taut extended rope, where they stood wobbling as they endeavoured to open paper sunshades.

Harry suddenly nudged Evelyn. Opposite them, in seats inferior to their own, a couple proceeded to take their place—Richard, and Jennifer Crowland wearing her gold locket and chain. Richard, perceiving his children, scowled at them venomously. Harry grinned. The village immediately ceased to pay any attention to the young Garofolis posturing on the tight-rope.

The next act revealed an elderly matron, Signora Garofoli, dressed as a ballerina in grubby white tarlatan. Standing erect upon a senile white horse of enormous girth, she eventually succeeded in crashing ungracefully through a hoop of fragile paper. Then came a performing bear, presented by a young Garofoli, and a fire-eater, who was none other than the acrobat of the tight-rope. At this point Lance Neville sauntered down the street and came to sit beside Celia, whereupon Harry's face grew dark.

The proprietor himself next condescended to do a few juggling tricks.

Lance said to Celia, holding a perfumed handkerchief to his nose :

"I find this display extremely tedious. And you ?"

"So do I," said Celia promptly, although her eyes were enormous and her cheeks like peonies in her excitement.

Very ostentatiously, Harry moved his seat, coming to sit upon the other side of Camila. He enquired in a menacing tone of voice :

" Camila, do you enjoy this circus ? "

" Indeed I do," she answered fervently, and he darted a glance of savage triumph in the direction of his sister, who paid him no attention whatsoever.

The closing act of the troupe Garofoli consisted of a firework display presided over by the entire family, and as no one at Monk's Tor had ever seen fireworks before, the whole audience gasped in rapture at the sizzling fiery stars rising in myriad radiant hosts towards the summer sky. Camila thought this the most beautiful thing she had ever seen, save for the Wild Swan ; a lump came into her throat as she watched.

Young Lance Neville addressed himself to Celia :

" Will you allow me to escort you home to Colerreddy ? It's a warm night, and I should be glad of a walk."

" If you please," she replied primly, hoping that she looked thirteen instead of twelve.

" Come on, the rest of you," Harry called imperiously to Evelyn and Camila ; but they had already slipped away, fearful of an encounter with Richard. He was alone.

Flushed and furious, he pushed his way through the crowd towards the circus-owner's wagon. Here he accosted Signor Garofoli, who, exhausted after his labours, was now happily engaged in swilling ale.

" Take me with you ! " Harry demanded passionately.

Signor Garofoli regarded him quizzically over his glass.

" And what could you do if you came with the troupe, eh ? "

" Anything," Harry told him vehemently.

The Signor broke into a tremendous guffaw of stomachic laughter.

" Come back, my little man, when you are older."

This was the last straw. Harry turned abruptly away. In the road, which was full of knots of people discussing

the circus, he suddenly bumped into his father, sauntering arm-in-arm with Jennifer Crowland, handsome, buxom, and black-browed.

"May I enquire," Richard demanded, not a whit discomposed by this encounter, "who gave you permission to attend this entertainment here to-night?"

Harry stared at him boldly.

"I stole some money from my mother's room, and if you tell her, I shall say I saw you parading in the village with madam here."

And then he took to his heels and fled until he found himself upon the moor.

PART III

THE WILD SWAN

CHAPTER XXII

1837. Already the Georgian epoch seemed a thing of the past; gone for ever were those fat bejewelled monarchs with their rich clothes, their German accents, their flashy mistresses, and their gout. It was as if the virginal young lady, seated so primly upon her tremendous throne, had suddenly flicked a feather-broom at the past, so that a thousand bedizened effigies crumbled away into dust. Gone were rakishness and lawlessness and wild carousing, and those mighty bucks and beaux who bullied night watchmen, and swooned with delight at the Opera, and who, drenching themselves with scent, sauntered forth of a morning to watch women burnt at the stake. Their day was done, and that of their ladies, with their turbans and feathers and their negro pages and their pretty conceit of learning and their smug, sugary little poems written in an Italian hand in Latin and Greek, and their lovers and their frankly illegitimate children—all these, too, were promptly and mercilessly swept away by the young lady with the feather-broom and the prim mouth.

Richard's day was over too, but he did not know it, Richard with his debts and his cheating and his grog and his ploughboy friends and his flaunting peasant mistress, and so was Harriet's, with all its vapours and caprices, its fine tawdry clothes and its screaming dirty cockatoo, its paint and powder, its Voltaire and its Byron and its ugly stealthy secret drinking. There was to be no place in the new era for persons such as these; vice, no longer unashamed, might parade itself no longer, but must disguise itself with a mask of respectability and hide skulking behind godliness and

sterling worth and family pride. Yet Colerreddy remained as it was—Colerreddy, isolated in the wildness of a dark and fearsome moor—Colerreddy, which was purely Georgian and saw no reason whatever to change with this new era that was too remote, too far removed from the moor people to make any strong impression upon their wild and simple minds. Perhaps there tinkled faintly in their ears the tiny, distant echo of a chime of joy-bells from the capital ; that was all. 1837 made no mark upon the lives of the people living round about Monk's Tor.

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Richard still visited Jennifer Crowland, of whom he was extremely fond ; it was said, indeed, that her two-year-old son was a proper Lovell, but of that there was no proof. Harriet, drinking still, and raging, and dreaming, and petting her parrot and disputing with Prudence, had not died from leading the most unhealthy life ever devised by woman, but appeared to flourish, in spite of having become so thin and white and hollow of cheek that sometimes she looked like a dead woman, a ghost from the time of the Georges, for her smart overtrimmed dresses were unfashionable now (she had given up pursuing the current mode in the pages of *La Belle Assemblée*), and she was more than ever a figure typical of by-gone Regency days.

Harry and Evelyn studied no more with Mr. O'Shea, who remained, nevertheless, their good friend, but were learning farming with Mr. Marsden of Pinetree Farm, riding there every morning on moor ponies and returning only with the dusk. Harry had become a big tall lad, with a shaggy black head, and swarthy skin, still bold and swaggering in his demeanour, but heavy, clumsy, a country man, for all his haughty ways. Evelyn was smaller and slighter, graceful where his brother was oafish, and handsome, too, with his straight, delicate features and his shining blonde hair and his sea-grey eyes with their strangely black lashes. His wrists were slender and his shoulders infinitely less

powerful than Harry's, but he was wiry, for all his light build, and a favourite wherever he went, being good-natured and friendly, and the possessor of charming manners.

The two girls, thrown much in each other's company, seemed on better terms than in the days of their childhood. Celia was good-looking, resembling Evelyn, but without his charm—tall and fair and ostensibly ice-cold, with a cool frosty radiance about her, and an air of elegance ; her hair was chestnut-gold, her nose sharp-cut and beautiful ; her mouth was proud and red, for already she painted it, and her slim neck helped, perhaps, to give her, even while she was but a young girl, much of the languid air of a lady of fashion. Yet still she loved to run wild with Harry on the moor ; and then she would forget her grown up pose, as, paddling in brooks or wading in bog and fen, she tore her gown and covered her shoes with mire.

In Camila the gypsy was strongly pronounced. She was of medium height, and strong and graceful ; her skin was tawny-dark, her mane of waving hair jet-black ; there were times when she was strikingly handsome, there were others when she looked plain ; her features were purely Eastern, the nose straight and a little flat, the chin narrow and pointed, the dark eyes set wide apart and almond-shaped, the teeth regular and exquisitely white. Even in her plain print gowns, with her black hair braided, she was still the *gitana*, and could be naught else, with her lithe grace of movement, her slanting keenness of gaze, the dusky bloom of her skin and something still more unmistakable, that curious expression of unsatisfied wildness which, even in repose, is never long absent from the faces of gypsy women, however happy, however beloved. Yet she was well-behaved and docile and hard-working ; and Prudence had grown to be fonder of her than of the selfish and imperious Celia.

The girls were past sixteen ; Richard, when he came home of an evening from his mysterious excursions to farm

or tavern or cottage, continued to eye Camila, after supper, with a long and piercing and reflective scrutiny. At first these attentions intrigued, then amused, and finally irritated her.

"Why, papa," she asked him boldly one night after supper, "do you stare at me so hard? Is my hair untied, or are there ink-stains on my nose?"

His devouring gaze became sullen. He answered shortly :

"Don't call me papa—you're no daughter of mine. I've long since given you permission to use my name."

"Richard, then," and he imagined that she lingered over the word, making it sound like sweet music. Actually she was on the defensive ; he made her uncomfortable when he stared at her so hungrily. Celia, who was sewing near by, now laughed affectedly.

"Really, papa ! To hear Camila call you by your Christian name produces the drollest possible effect. People would think her very pert and forward——"

"Mind your own business," he told her rudely, and she tossed her head.

In truth, he was thinking of the night, many years ago, when he had entertained the gypsies, of Camila's sister, dancing wildly, like a tawny flame that burned with a brief fierceness, of the yelling, nasal *flamenco* singing that had so much excited his senses, and he guessed that in this young girl, seated so demurely with a darning-basket upon her knees, there slept, hidden deep down, a secret fire as bright, as savage, and as wild. Furthermore, apart from the magic that glowed for him in women of her race, he wanted Camila for herself. He had always had a liking for her, and he wished again that Harriet were dead, and he free to make the gypsy mistress of his house. He thought, too, of Jennifer Crowland, and of how he had once come upon her spinning at her cottage-door. As it happened, she had first attracted him because she, too, was black-browed, like a Romany woman, being of Cornish blood. But now he was a little surfeited of Jennifer, and he wanted someone fresher. He wanted Camila.

He wanted her so much that he soon became fastidious about his appearance, and would often of a morning, knowing that he was about to see her, study his reflection in the silver-wreathed mirror at his dressing-table with an absorbed meticulous gravity that would have seemed to Harriet highly absurd. As he peered solemnly into this looking-glass, he beheld a rugged, weather-beaten face with crows' feet spiking from his eyelids and an arched beaky nose and shaggy tufted eyebrows. Yet his great head was still leonine, although the mouse-brown hair was grizzled now, and he was tall and not too stout, and his shoulders were broad, and he walked with a certain swagger.

"She should be glad to mate with me after all—a nameless gypsy foundling child," he thought; then always, damping the glow of his excitement, came a sharp, bitter memory of Harriet pacing the floor of her bedroom like a wild beast shut in some mountebank's cage.

If only Harriet would die. If only Harriet would die!

Shut in his study, brooding among his dusty books and his splendid velvet curtains that were rotting to bits before his eyes, with his fire sinking lower and the wind lashing at his window-panes outside, this desire became an obsession. Why did she not die? Of what use was she, she who had for eighteen years scolded and raved at him and ignored her children and debauched herself?

"The damned witch," he thought to himself, "she'll outlive me out of spite. And yet she's often said she'd be better dead."

This was true—she must have wished herself in her grave a thousand times since she had come to live at Colerreddy; and Richard, having grown used to what he called her spleen, had for the last ten years scarcely listened to her when she talked in this strain. She wanted to die, and he wanted her to die. Why, then, should she remain alive?

And so he brooded, and so he stared at Camila, while the autumn passed; and then it was winter, always Harriet's worst time.

CHAPTER XXIII

Camila had little time to spare for Richard's heavy, disconcerting gaze. She was, in fact, often unconscious of it, being greatly occupied with thoughts of Evelyn. She loved Evelyn, she told herself ; had always loved him since their first meeting, many years ago, when he had been a pretty blue-eyed child in a low-necked shirt with frills on his shoulders. Her attachment for him, curiously precocious, had altered not at all since these childhood days, and she was ready to marry him or to take him for her lover whenever he should ask her. But Evelyn did not ask her. Nor did he attempt to make love to her. His affection seemed still to be the fondness of a child for its favourite playmate, and he was content to be with her for hours at a time while he talked to her of his studies, or of his farming, or of her new dress, or of Harriet's latest vagary. At night he kissed her, coolly and gently, as though he were kissing Celia. Always he was thoughtful and affable with her, seeming to think, in the very teeth of family opposition, that she should have the best of everything ; but she felt that she was incapable of stirring him as she herself was stirred, and she grieved in secret, almost regretting what she had once loved most in him, that gay and charming indifference that had become a wall and a barrier between them.

So vague, in fact, was Evelyn that he did not even notice what Harry and Celia had for some time commented upon sardonically to one another—their father's odd obsession for the gypsy. Celia tittered, seeming to find such a state of affairs droll enough, but Harry, always jealous of Camila, drew his brows in a black line across his forehead and became more surly in his manner both to Richard and to his

foster-sister. At this period in their lives Richard and Harry were always falling out. There was seldom a week without two or three quarrels ; and it seemed as though Camila, doomed always to be a bone of contention, would finally precipitate matters between them and drive Harry for good to Pinetree Farm.

The winter that year was dreary and relentless. Snow fell on the moor—it seemed as though spring had forgotten Monk's Tor, and would never come again. The long and bitter months brought much sickness to the scattered hamlets ; the old people dropped and died until it seemed that there was a burial every day in the churchyard where snow lay like sugar-icing upon the black roof of the great yew-tree at the gate, and where, behind the dark thick foliage, white owls shivered, snuggling together in an attempt to keep warm and filling the air with wild, desolate, piteous cries. The cattle suffered, too ; there were deep drifts out on the moor which trapped straying sheep, and there was no grazing for the cows and ponies, only a waste of sad, bluish snow crusting the heath and bracken and obscuring the pack-horse trails, until travellers were sometimes lost on these terrible nights, and it was whispered over the cheerful fires of lonely farms that the Elf-King, becoming bolder when snow whirled from the sky, rode abroad after dark to claim each night another victim.

At Colerreddy only Prudence remained completely undisturbed by snow or sleet, by gale or storm. As always, in her neat black alpaca gown, with her grey woollen cross-over shawl, her mittens, and her spectacles on the end of her nose, she trotted about creaking passages, turned the handles of closed doors, and succeeded as usual in obtruding her nose into everyone else's business. Always she watched over Harriet, grim, disapproving, vigilant as a peevish mastiff ; and Harriet, grown after so many years more cunning than a snake, often succeeded in outwitting her. At night, when Colerreddy slept, Harriet, if she had not got what she wanted, roamed the house from garret to cellar

searching for the dark magic that made her for a few hours forget the sordid miseries of that life which she had so often declared to be unbearable.

Tall, emaciated, ghostly, trailing the grimy white of her garments in the dust caking the floors of her home, her smoke-black hair framing her ravaged ashen face, in which the black eyes burned like smouldering coals, Harriet, as she wandered from room to room, with her candle leaving behind it a trail of grease, must have put to rout that other spectre, the spirit of Richard's Aunt Adelaide ; for the two never met.

When she succeeded in finding drink, she was quiet for many days, lying sprawled on her bed like a dead woman, with her white clenched mouth turned up towards the window, undisturbed by the howling of the wind, or by the gusts of snow that were flung against the panes. At such times she appeared strangely young, for in the darkness the haggard lines were blotted from her face, and then one might even catch a glimpse of that ambitious young lady who many years ago had found Voltaire better reading than *La Belle Assemblée*.

The other members of the family became quarrelsome and moody, as the weeks dragged by and the gales intensified and the drifts upon the moor grew daily deeper. Richard, shut up alone in his study, wrestled with black temptations of his own. Celia, starved of that gaiety for which her soul hungered, fashioned showy dresses that she would never be able to wear. Harry, lounging about on the sofa with his pipe in his mouth, seemed determined to show his family how boorish he could succeed in being if he tried. Evelyn dreamed away the winter, beautiful, cold, aloof as the King of Elf-land himself. To Camila he was a frozen statue, and she tried desperately to thaw him back to life. But Evelyn most engagingly refused to be thawed.

"What would you do," she asked him at last in despair, "supposing that the gypsies, whose child I am, came back

one day to kidnap me, and hid me away for weeks out on the moor ? ”

He smiled and stroked her hand.

“ You know that I would rescue you ? ”

“ But how ? I am afraid you would never even notice that I was gone.”

“ That’s absurd, since we have always been playmates. Now, if the gypsies came for Celia, they might have her with my blessing, for my lady has snapped my head off every evening since the winter began.”

Camila repeated, shaking her head :

“ You wouldn’t notice for a long time that I was gone . . . and then I think you would fall into a reverie and forget all about me again.”

“ Such nonsense,” he said indulgently, but his eyes were abstracted. “ Who was it, after all, who many years ago plagued papa to let you stay with us for ever ? ”

“ A bad day’s work,” put in Harry suddenly from the fire-side.

“ I hate you, Harry,” Camila told him, and indeed she thought she did, for in these days he was seldom anything but disagreeable.

“ In fact,” Harry remarked, knocking out his pipe on the hearthstone, “ you prefer my father to his son ? ”

“ Indeed I do.”

Harry laughed to himself, looking at her quizzically, but she took no notice, for she was absorbed in a renewed effort to capture Evelyn’s attention.

“ To-morrow’s Sunday,” she said, “ and you are free from the farm. Shall we go out on the moors to the Tor and get some fresh air ? I’ve been over long in the house this week.”

As she spoke, she felt suddenly that she was speaking the truth, that she could indeed no longer endure to be inside the four walls of Colerreddy, with its dark musty rooms, its moth-eaten curtains, its dust, its creaking passages, and its hosts of spectres, both alive and dead. The house, she

thought, had become during the winter more powerful, more menacing, like some fearsome vampire that sucked from them their vitality, their humanity, their very life-blood. Outside on the moors, where the wind sighed like a lost soul over snow-blanchèd desolation, there was loneliness and nakedness, a wild land locked in the cruel grip of winter, but there was also a grandeur that was not far removed from beauty, and in the house there was no grandeur, only decay.

"Please, Evelyn," she insisted in an urgent voice, for she began really to feel that unless they might be alone again, the two of them together, somewhere out in the snow by the great Tor, he would continue to elude her, like the solitary elvish spirit that he was, and then the spring would bring with it no comfort, only a sad restlessness, and for her it would still be winter, even when the primroses bloomed again.

"Of course I'll come," Evelyn promised.

"We might take some food," she said, "and eat it in the shelter of the Tor."

Harry laughed from the other side of the room.

"The werewolves will get it, and you too. And don't expect me to search for you when you are missing; I intend to spend my Sunday quietly roasting chestnuts here in front of the fire."

"You'll have chilblains on every finger if you loiter on the moor in a blizzard," Celia suggested helpfully.

"Camila never has chilblains," Evelyn told her, and lay back in his chair, his head shining with a silver radiance in the twinkling flame of the candles that now guttered low in their sconces.

A few moments later Harry got up and went to bed without a word. Soon Evelyn yawned and followed him, tossing an airy and impartial kiss to the two girls. For some time they sewed in silence; then, as the fire sank lower, a chill breath crept into the room. Celia put away her needlework, smoothing it carefully, for it was to be another fine dress.

"I'm going to the kitchen for the warming-pan."

Camila nodded, her chin on her hand.

"Put out the lights, Camila," said Celia from the door.

Camila obeyed. The fire was almost dead ; in the grate one solitary ember glowed like a red star. Taking her candle, she followed Celia towards the kitchen, but she found it dark and empty, for she had dawdled and Celia was already upstairs warming her bed. Beneath the study-door gleamed a thread of light, showing that Richard was still awake. As she walked upstairs, she heard his door open and knew that he, too, was on his way to bed.

CHAPTER XXIV

Upstairs on the landing all was dark and silent behind the door where Harriet lay. Camila remembered that nobody but Prudence had seen the mistress of the house for two days and realised that she must be going through one of her "bad spells," as Prudence always called them. She tiptoed past the door, anxious not to waylay Richard, because of late Richard had been so disconcerting in his manner towards her. Outside her own room she paused for a moment, hearing Celia move within, and, taking the pins from her hair, let her black locks fall loose about her face. Then it was that she perceived behind her on the landing the pale glow of Richard's candle. But there was no sound, no sign of life. Richard must be standing, perfectly still, outside his wife's door, and this was such a strange thing for him to do that instead of joining Celia in their bedroom, she became inquisitive and crept down the passage to spy on him.

Shading her candle in her hand, she peered round the corner of the passage and observed him in silence for several moments. He stood there motionless and erect, in his breeches and stockinged feet, wearing a shabby dressing-gown, the fine brocade worn threadbare. He seemed enormous in the faint light that threw on to the door before him a black gigantic shadow. She noticed that the hand holding the candle shook, so that grease spluttered on to the floor, and with his untidy grizzled hair pushed back from his face,—a sick man's face—heavy and livid—he looked so wild that she was frightened ; she could hardly realise that this was Evelyn's father. For a long time he towered motionless on the landing, his eyes fixed on Harriet's

door ; then, as she watched, he fumbled vaguely with one outstretched hand and pawed at the door softly, then slid his hand towards the knob. Harriet had forgotten, as she often did when she had been drinking, to lock herself in, and the door opened quietly. In went Richard and his candle, and then the door closed swiftly, and Camila was alone in the darkness without.

She knew immediately that something was wrong, for he avoided Harriet, more especially when she was in drink. Nor did he ever, save in the daytime and then very rarely, enter her room. That he should now deliberately secrete himself at dead of night in that hushed wicked silence meant, she decided, that he intended to steal her trinkets and her money ; and this surprised her, for if Richard thieved it was usually in the grand manner, and there was certainly nothing to be proud of in robbing a drunken woman of a few paltry jewels. Because she admired Richard she was ashamed for him, and, creeping towards the door, she tried to peer through the keyhole.

She could see nothing, for the key was in the door, and growing bolder, she turned the handle. A strange sight met her as she entered.

The windows were uncurtained, and a stream of pale cold light pouring from the winter moon frosted the snow-flakes drifting pitifully against the panes, until they gleamed like feathers plucked from wild swans' plumage. The same light flung a great silvery bar across the floor and made it easy for the gypsy to spy upon Richard Lovell and his wife. The room itself was in wild confusion. Satin and taffeta dresses, turbans, feathered bonnets and Kashmir shawls lay flung upon the ground as though blown there by a whirlwind. In the midst of the pool of moonlight lay a pink kid slipper, narrow and pointed for dancing, its rose ribbons trailing—a shabby shoe, Camila noticed, as though it had been often worn in the past. The dressing-table, swimming in a pond of radiance, revealed a heap of turquoise-studded brushes and combs, and powder spilt like snow, and jars

of rouge, coral-pink, some empty bottles, an overturned glass, a bedraggled hare's foot upon which spirits had been upset, and a pair of curling-tongs that had burnt a black hole in an exquisite lace-trimmed handkerchief. In a corner of the room the parrot croaked sleepily in his hooded cage, and behind the parrot, coated thick with dust, was heaped a high wall of books,—the books that Harriet no longer read.

Beside the bed stood Richard. His candle, now burning low, still dripped grease upon the rug. With one hand he had draped back the wine-dark curtains of the four-poster, and Harriet was revealed, stretched on her side, so fragile in sleep that her body seemed to drift into invisibility beneath the bed-clothes, as though dissolving into foam. If she breathed at all, it was so quietly that she might already have been dead, and her finely carved face, from which the skin was drawn back tightly, exposing the bone, seemed whiter than the pillows beneath. Only her hair stood out, inky black, against the pallid background. Richard stood for some time gazing down upon this frail unconscious body, his pale, heavy face distorted by a set vindictiveness which gave it an aspect of savage determination and brutal cunning, with its bared teeth and the stare of its glaring eye-balls, gloating over Harriet, as though his hand were already raised to kill. Murder was written on his face, cold, deadly, premeditated murder ; it was clear to the watcher that he must have thought for many nights of this horrible thing that he was about to do. Suddenly, with a fixed and confident air of resolution, he put down his candle on the table near by and began to roll up his sleeves. Camila noticed with a hateful fascination how powerfully the muscles stood out on his arms, how strong and capable and sinewy were his hands. Soon, in one second, those hands would close like a steel vice about the white stem of Harriet's throat, and then, very swiftly, perhaps before she could awake from her stupor, the life would be choked and throttled from her, and she would be paler still, and quieter,

less tormented, perhaps, when her soul had fled. Richard bent over the bed.

Camila spoke suddenly in a low voice, but it seemed to her as though she must have roused the whole household.

"Richard !"

At that he paused and straightened himself, his arms hanging by his sides, as she came right into the room and stood there facing him with her candle.

In her pale dress, with the jetty mane of hair hanging about her olive face and her great eyes burning black as night into his own, she appeared to him as a spirit, a witch-woman, perhaps as the dark guardian of Harriet's soul. Yet she was Camila the gypsy, for whose sake he had been about to commit murder. He stared at her stupidly, yet without anger.

"Richard," she said again, speaking low but imperiously, "come away, quickly, or she may wake, and then you are lost."

But he stood there stolidly and made no movement.

"Richard !"

"Do you remember," he asked suddenly, "how she has always slighted you and how, when you were little, she would send you to eat in the kitchen ?"

"That is my affair, not yours. I can revenge myself, if I need revenge, without your help."

"Look at her for a moment," he commanded in a soft insistent voice ; "she hasn't moved, has she—she's quite unconscious of our presence here. Do you know why ? Because she is already half-dead, sodden with drink. If you come nearer, you will make the charming discovery that her very breath stinks of spirits. A pretty wife ! Can you blame me, Camila ?"

"Come out of this room and I'll talk to you. But if you stay here, I shall rouse Harry and Evelyn. Do you hear ?"

"Indeed, demon !" But his tone was admiring, and with a last sullen glance at Harriet he followed her on to the landing readily enough.

There he seized her wrist.

"Do you know," he said, "why I wanted to kill that creature?"

"I neither know nor care."

"Yet you shall listen, Camila, since you are not altogether blameless in this matter. You know, perhaps, that I have been witch-ridden these twelve years, ever since the day when first I bought you from your tribe for seven guineas?"

She was honestly astonished.

"Witch-ridden? What do you mean—that someone has put a spell upon you? If so, what has that to do with me?"

He laughed, leaning against Harriet's door, thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets.

"Nothing, except that you, Camila, are the sorceress. You and your cursed Egyptians. Come, now, don't play the innocent with me—even when you were a babe you were already wise, like an imp's child. I saw. I have remembered, although it is now twelve years ago."

"But I don't understand," she said; "if you think I am a witch, you must be tipsy or mad. There is talk in the village, I know, but it's not of me that they gossip, but of your wife there, that——"

"Listen," he interrupted harshly; "that night when the gypsies were my guests here at Colerreddy, they made me drunk with their infernal music and I was, indeed, as one who has been bewitched. I have never recovered from that witchcraft, for when the first spell began to lose its effect, behold! Camila was a woman grown, and I was once more in the power of the Egyptians."

As he spoke, his lips protruded and his face became paler. She shrank from him and in her heart cried out for Evelyn. Richard advanced a step towards her.

"Marry me, Camila! Why should Harriet stand between us? Don't refuse at once, Camila, before you have reflected; remember, I am not old, not so very old, still young enough to love you as you should be loved. And

remember, too, I have not asked to be your lover as I might have here to-night, but have done you the honour of making a more formal offer——”

“I don’t want to wed with a murderer. Nor do I want to wed with you, Richard Lovell, neither would I, even if Madam in there were lying dead of heart-failure. Please understand that, will you, and then we will never speak of it again.”

She spoke sharply and with deliberate cruelty, for she was terrified by the wild voice with which he raved at her, by his feverish eyes, his distorted face, all streaked with sweat. Quite suddenly he had become a monster, and he appalled her.

He asked abruptly :

“I suppose you realise that I could fling you penniless out on to the moor to-night, if it pleased me to do so ? ”

“As you please. I should not be long alone. Gypsy women, I believe, never are.”

“In that case,” he replied, “if you are already so indifferent to your fate, I withdraw my offer and will make you my mistress. What have you to say to that ? ”

“Oh, leave me alone, Richard,” she entreated ; “you talk as though I were a slave, to be bought or sold at your will. Well, I’m not, and I’ll not be your mistress either, and you should think shame to ask me, when you are keeping the herdsman’s wife out there near the Tor.”

For answer he held up his candle, that had sunk low into its socket, and regarded her intently by its fitful, guttering light.

“Am I, indeed, so wicked ? ” he asked. “Let us consider, Camila. First, I am an outcast, having been discovered cheating at a game of chance. To you and your people that should mean less than nothing. Secondly, being in love, and married to a drunken harridan of a wife, I have to-night planned murder. That, again, should mean nothing to one who is bred a gypsy. May I also remind you, Camila, that the knife of your fascinating parent

was stained brown with human blood? Yet he showed it to me with pride. Am I to believe, then, that you are in love with someone else? Is it one of my sons?"

"No, no, no!" she told him violently, fearful now for Evelyn. "I am in love with no one. You seem to have forgotten that I am only sixteen past. So go now and leave me——"

"Sixteen," he interrupted, "that is the same as twenty-one in an Egyptian. Come, Camila," he continued, half jesting, half in earnest, "this is your fault—how can I resist those flashing eyes of yours, that graceful body, that dusky skin, that hair like a blackbird's wings? I'm a man, you're a woman and a gypsy. There! It was bound to happen. Let's make the best of it, and whether we marry or not, I'll treat you like a loving husband, and my children shall respect you!"

If only Evelyn had been speaking! But from Richard she recoiled savagely, with hatred in her heart. Suddenly she ceased to be civilised and was once more the daughter of Lobo; when he wound his arms about her, pressing his hot face against her neck, she struck him across the mouth and bit his hand viciously. He cursed her, but was delighted with her spirit, and for all her frantic struggles, he succeeded in gathering her up into his arms.

Then they were interrupted, for there was a soft sound of footsteps in the room behind them. Richard paused to listen, and in an instant she had slid from his arms. Not a moment too soon, for the door opened and Harriet stood there on the threshold, looking at them vaguely with a dazed stare.

She swayed and tottered, but, catching at the door, she steadied herself and stood, tall and thin in her flowing white nightgown, with the massed ebony of her hair unbound, her strained, thin face weary now, and haggard, and deep violet circles round her eyes.

She said petulantly:

"Really, Richard! Must you make love outside my very

door ? Pray take your mistress—whoever she may be, for I have long since lost count—to a more suitable apartment, and leave me to sleep.”

Camila shrank back into the shadow.

Richard scratched his head, ceasing immediately to be a monster and a murderer, and becoming once again an oafish overgrown schoolboy.

“Go to bed,” he said, not unkindly ; “you have had a nightmare, and imagined things that don’t exist.”

She stared at him again and asked disconcertingly :

“Do you remember the acacia trees by the river near to Richmond ? ”


Richard found no suitable reply.

“You made love mighty prettily in those days,” she told him, “and should have improved since, having had so much practice. However, I am no longer curious.”

“Excellent,” said Richard, “and now I suggest you go to bed before you catch cold.”

With a shrug of her shoulders she obeyed him, for she was still tipsy and half dead with sleep.

Looking around him, Richard observed that he was now alone on the landing. Camila had fled. Suddenly conscience-stricken, he took up his candle and went shuffling off to his own room.



CHAPTER XXV

Richard awoke the next morning feeling ashamed and uneasy. Well, he reflected, at least he had tried to achieve something after rotting for years at Colerreddy ; he had actually attempted both to murder his wife and to seduce Camila, and it was possibly only by the grace of God that his plans had come to nothing. He thought again, and came to the conclusion that it was just as well that he had not succeeded in strangling Harriet ; he would, he imagined, have been at that moment in a worse panic if he had. Yet he loathed her and resented her presence in his house, and it was certainly not remorse that caused him to rejoice at her reprieve. No, he must be frank ; it was because that insolent slut of a gypsy would have refused him, even had he been in a position to offer her marriage. The gypsy seemed positively hostile, and it would have been unendurable to have committed murder with a definite object in view and then, in the end, when his hands were steeped in blood, to have been defeated in his plans by the obstinacy of a girl of sixteen.

He decided that his sole regret was for his failure to seduce Camila. He had gone to the length of offering her marriage, she had rejected the offer with contempt, and he should have taken possession of her without further ado, and would have done so, but for Harriet's intervention.

Harriet.

Why had Harriet mentioned the acacia-trees and the river near Richmond, the scene of an earlier and more conventional proposal ? Frowning, he tried to evoke that half-forgotten scene :—they had watched their reflections in the rippling water as they sat hand-in-hand, and she

had worn a dress the colour of wheat, and her heart had beaten fast against his side when first he kissed her. And last night he had stood over her bed with murder in his heart, and his hands had itched to close upon her throat.

He was stupid, and he had let himself decay too long ; his brain was incapable of grappling with these tremendous facts, but quite suddenly, remembering the river, and Harriet's dress, he experienced a new and awful shame that was like a leaden weight upon his heart—a shame that was no longer wounded vanity, the humiliation of having been insulted and rejected by Camila, but an emotion altogether more poignant and more profound, a sick and bleeding grief at the sordid wreckage he and Harriet had made of their life together.

His pity for Harriet increased a thousandfold his resentment against Camila, and he was no longer capable of realising that Harriet was alive only because of Camila's intervention. No, the gypsy knew too much about him, and must go. Immediately, having made this decision, he found himself involved in a mental conflict, for in spite of his anger, he desired her more than ever. Never mind, she must go ; he would thrust her forth from Coleruddy to the ditches from whence she came, for she, and none other, had been responsible for the evil that had possessed him the night before. Perhaps she had bewitched him, the better to get him in her power, since she and all her kind were bred of Satan, and now, unless he did as she pleased, she would talk to Harry and Evelyn, and the parson, and Prudence, and God knows who and they would know him for what he was—a man capable of murder.

Yet when he went downstairs and found the two girls laying the table for dinner, he found it hard to realise that he had not dreamed the horrors of the night before. Lighting his pipe, he scrutinised the gypsy closely.

Like Celia, she wore a plain brown dress, with a tuck of white lawn at the throat ; yet it could not, he noticed, disguise the lithe and supple movements of her body, and

she had a strange gliding walk, like that other girl who long ago had danced the *romális* in his dining-room. Her coal-black hair was braided, and wound in a great plait across her head ; she should have worn earrings, but he did not miss them, for the glowing dusky oval of her face seemed to him outlandish enough—heathen and barbaric, with its warm mouth, like a red flower, its high cheekbones, its dark, brilliant, evasive eyes. No, he decided, she was not beautiful—his own daughter was better-looking—but she was more dangerous than a pretty woman, and once again, as he looked at her, he felt her strong and subtle spell. He turned his back deliberately.

“ My dinner, Camila.”

“ It’s not yet ready,” she answered carelessly, without looking at him.

“ Then make haste, will you ? ”

“ You’re early, Papa,” Celia told him.

“ Am I talking to you ? ”

Celia pouted.

Camila returned with two dishes, which she set upon the table. While the other two sat down, she slipped towards the door. Richard looked up immediately.

“ Where are you going ? ”

“ I’m not eating here to-day.”

“ Why not ? ” Celia wanted to know.

“ Because I’m taking some food on to the moor. I shall walk towards the farm and meet the boys when they come home.”

“ By God you shan’t ! ” Richard informed her violently, and Celia became all attention.

“ Why not ? ” Camila enquired calmly.

“ Because I say you shan’t, my girl, so sit down and eat your dinner.”

“ No, Richard.”

So she was beginning already to defy him ! He turned to his daughter.

“ Leave the room. I want a word with Camila.”

"But, Papa," Celia protested, "my dinner will be cold."

"Go when I tell you, before I lay hands on you!"

Celia departed in a fine tantrum.

Richard shut the door. Camila, standing opposite, watched him narrowly. She said at length:

"I suppose you imagine that I shall tell Harry and Evelyn what happened last night? Well, set your mind at rest; I shall keep my tongue quiet, although not from love of you."

"Indeed! Why, then, so merciful?"

She was disconcerted by the harshness of his voice. She replied, after reflection:

"Because there's enough bitterness in this dreary old house without my adding to it. As it is, few enough of you will speak to one another. If I told tales, you'd all be drawing knives."

"If my house is so distasteful to you, you are under no obligation to remain here."

She thought of what it would mean to leave Evelyn, and felt almost faint. For fear of betraying herself, she answered coolly:

"I know. I have thought of that. I'm no kin of yours, and as free as the curlews out on the moor. I can go whenever I please."

At that moment he hated her, knowing how feeble was his power. He said insolently:

"Go, then, whenever you please, you and your pack of spells. And I'll play the gypsy and tell your future—you'll die like a dog out there on the moor, soft-bred, pampered in this house of mine that you despise."

"On the contrary, I shall take a gypsy lover, and we'll both bewitch you from outside your gates."

But she thought, as she spoke, of the old woman who had haunted her since childhood, and shuddered, for she could imagine no fate more horrible than that of being consigned to the Egyptian people. House-living had,

indeed, spoiled her ; she was, she reflected, of no use either to the Romanies or to the white folk.

"Oh, Richard," she implored suddenly, "why can we not be friends as before ? I'll forget last night, if you will, for I know that a madness came over you and is finished now. Why can't we blot it from our minds and never talk any more of love between us ?

"By God, that's diverting."

"Please, Richard."

He pushed his chair away from the table with a harsh grating sound.

"No, my girl. You need a lesson, it seems to me. Like all your race, you're wanton—you delight in leading men on ; then, when you've achieved your ambition, you're as quick as a fish to slip from their arms. With lads like Harry and Evelyn you may amuse yourself thus. But with me, no. So keep your tongue quiet, my gypsy, else you may be thrust outside my door, and please to talk no more to me of friendship. Recollect, Camila, I am no longer eighteen, no longer even thirty."

And he marched out of the room with an immense and pompous dignity.

No sooner had he gone than Celia came back.

"What is all this mystery ? Why did papa want so much to speak to you alone ? "

"Presumably," said Camila, "because he had something private to say."

"But what ? Why won't you tell me ? Oh, Camila, you've never taken him for your lover, and he so old, and with grey in his hair ? "

"That I've not. How foolish you are ! There's no love between us, I swear—indeed, sometimes I think I hate him."

"Then you are most ungrateful, as mamma has always said, since it was he who took you from the Egyptians."

Camila thought of Richard's madness, of his wife's hostility, of Evelyn's remote indifference.

"Perhaps he should have let me bide."

CHAPTER XXVI

Meanwhile Richard, in his new mood of penitence, went upstairs to Harriet's room. He knocked at the door and, after a pause, was invited to enter.

Harriet, expecting Prudence or Celia, stared at him enquiringly. Wrapped in a cream-coloured Kashmir shawl, her dark hair combed from her forehead, she sat at her dressing-table before her mirror with a hare's foot in her hand. Her face was already painted, but the vivid spots of colour on her cheeks accentuated their hollows and the haggard lines about her mouth and the heavy bluish shadows round her eyes. She looked cold and sickly and wretched, and, in spite of the bright fire leaping in her grate, she shivered. The room was gloomy, for outside the skies were grey and sullen. On the back of her chair perched the parrot, a flash of vivid tropical colour in the shadowy room. When Richard appeared, the parrot cocked its head on one side and regarded him quizzically with an eye exactly like a black currant.

"Good day," said Richard awkwardly, and felt more pitiful than ever to see her look so ill.

"What do you want?" she asked him sharply.

It was difficult to explain. He sat down in an armchair and wondered if she remembered anything of last night's scene on the landing. He need not have been afraid; it had been washed completely from her fuddled brain.

"I came to see you, Harriet."

"Then you must want something. What is it—more money, I suppose?"

"No. I am in no need of money."

She took her great snowball of a powder-puff and lightly

dusted her face. Her movements were restless and jerky, as though her nerves were quivering, and once or twice her face twitched, giving her an ugly, distorted look. More than ever now he wanted to comfort her.

"What is it, then?" she asked impatiently. "You know I hate to have you staring at me while I am dressing."

"Harriet," he stammered, "please to listen for a minute."

"Well?"

"This winter," he plunged on, "I have thought often of you. You shouldn't live as you are living, shut up here in this room like a prisoner, ailing and lonely, seeing no one but that old cat Prudence, talking to no one, with only the moor to look at."

She put down her powder-puff.

"Whose fault is it that I was brought here? Did I wish to leave London all those years ago?"

"I know," he told her, "I am to blame—that's why I'm talking to you now. Harriet, I want in some way to atone for all the misery I have brought you since we were married."

"You are not the Almighty, to work miracles."

"Oh, please listen, Harriet! I know well enough I can't work miracles, but surely there is some way in which you can be made happier, or less unhappy, than you are?"

"None that I know of. You come too late."

He thought once more of Richmond, of the languorous acacia trees reflected in the cool greenness of the water, of Harriet's yellow dress, of their first kiss, so eager and so triumphant. He continued obstinately:

"Why can we not dine together, and talk together sometimes, and perhaps even become friends as we grow older?"

And it never once struck him that he had refused earlier in the day an exactly similar request from Camila.

Harriet shivered again and caught her shawl more tightly about her thin shoulders.

"Please go, Richard. You make yourself ridiculous."

The parrot suddenly uttered a piercing squawk, as though to express agreement.

Richard rose, defeated. None the less, he still persisted.

"In the summer, if your health improved, you might have a carriage and take Celia driving about the countryside. And the moor, you know, is beautiful in summer——"

Harriet began suddenly to laugh. And she continued to laugh until the tears rolled down her cheeks and she coughed, and then it sounded almost as though she sobbed, but the wild peals of her mirth grew in intensity until the parrot began to scream an accompaniment. And then, for the noise was like that of a madhouse, Richard gave up the struggle and went away.

On the stairs he met Celia and Prudence, both much alarmed at the unusual sounds of merriment still issuing from Harriet's room.

"I am going on a visit to London," he told them.

And he went into his study and banged the door. There it suddenly occurred to him that he was no longer afraid of Camila and what she might do to him if she chose. It would be his word against hers, and if she betrayed him, how easy to throw the blame on her ! He was amazed at not having thought of this before.

As for Harriet, he pitied her from the bottom of his heart, but he could think of no way to help her. She was right ; he had come too late. And he was unhappy, for he had really pictured his future existence as one of noble and perpetual atonement for that atrocious crime so nearly committed the night before. He honestly wanted to atone. He would buy her a present in London. And Camila—but here his wounded pride, that had for some hours given place to a more unselfish emotion, began once again to trouble him. He would never forgive Camila for that look of repulsion, when he had tried to kiss her. Never, never, never. Somehow he would humiliate her, and then, when she had sunk low enough, he would take her for his mistress, since he still wanted her, and then, deliberately, he would

cast her aside for the peasant woman, Jennifer Crowland. That would teach the gypsy her place.

At that moment the door of his study opened and Harry came in.

"Why don't you knock at the door?" Richard irritably enquired.

"I thought you were out."

"What do you want?"

"Only to warm myself before the fire. I've been out on the fens all day searching for sheep."

"There's the kitchen fire," Richard told him crossly, "and there's also a fire in the dining-room."

"Evelyn and Camila are taking up all the room in there."

Sinking down, Harry thrust his boots towards the grate, where they very soon began to steam. Richard watched him, caught by a new idea. He asked at length:

"Not lovesick for the gypsy, are you, Harry?"

"Not I," said Harry morosely. After a pause he observed:

"I think, though, that she is in love with Evelyn."

"What?" Richard started up.

"I think so," Harry repeated.

"What leads you to suppose such a thing?"

"I have eyes in my head."

"So she likes that child! And he—tell me, Harry," his voice grew eager, "does Evelyn return her affection?"

Harry laughed.

"Evelyn loves nobody. Nobody, that is, except his own reflection in the mirror."

Richard was silent. During these last few moments he had learned much about the children, and he sat for some time assimilating his knowledge. He came at length to the conclusion that Evelyn, in spite of, perhaps because of, his youth and childishness, had beyond doubt been unconsciously the real barrier between Camila and himself. Furthermore, he reflected, Evelyn must strike anyone as beautiful who cared for long-lashed eyes and a girl's cheek

and silken curling hair. Personally, had he been a woman, he would have preferred to these milk-and-water charms Harry's dark, sulky face and strong, heavy body, but everyone knew that there was no accounting for feminine tastes. So that was Camila's secret ! The cunning little bitch !

" You are not, by any chance, jealous ? " he enquired of his elder son.

" Jealous ? No. I've no love for Camila."

" It's as well," said Richard sourly, " for I'll not have my sons fighting for a nameless gypsy like dogs over a bone."

Harry, knowing of his father's passion, grinned secretly, but Richard did not notice, being occupied in reflecting with a grim pleasure that now, knowing Camila's weakness, he could punish her as he longed so much to do.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE next week he took the long and arduous journey by coach to London. He travelled each day through black moorland, where were dark, still pools—for the snow had melted—and here and there sparse sombre trees. At night he slept in the damp beds of draughty and uncomfortable taverns. By day he sat beside the coachman, who grumbled unceasingly, complaining that these new monsters of iron and steel, that whirled through the countryside shrieking and vomiting fire, would soon drive himself and his brothers off the English roads.

"I wouldn't travel in one of those new-fangled machines for ten guineas," said Richard.

"Ah, you say that now, sir," answered the coachman, shaking his head, "but just wait a year or two, and then we'll see, we'll see."

"That's a fine team of horses," said Richard, desirous of putting a stop to this croaking.

"They are, sir. The off-leader won steeplechase after steeplechase over in Ireland, where he was foaled."

"Indeed? Why, then, has he sunk so low?"

"Age, sir," said the coachman, "age and temper. But I wouldn't call a stage low myself, sir, although of course it's all a matter of opinion, and them as drives these bloody screaming railway-trains no doubt doesn't think us chaps of the road good enough to spit on."

"Possibly not," Richard agreed, and was glad when he reached the Blue Boar Inn in Jermyn Street.

London quickly swallowed him up, and one might have looked for him in vain about gay Tyburnia, in the houses of the rich, and found him at last perhaps among the low pothouses of Cheapside, where he sat with jockeys and

Jews and all kinds of flashmen, a girl on his knee, his face flushed, and his eye glazed, trying, perhaps, to forget Camila. Once, at one of these resorts, he suddenly caught sight of a slender, tawny, overdressed youth, black-browed, dark and serpentine of aspect. Richard knew him at once for what he was—a gypsy.

“Come here, you,” he shouted, “and drink with me,” and, nothing loth, the lad promptly obeyed him.

Meanwhile, at Colerreddy, Harry was deriving a certain sardonic pleasure from watching his brother and Camila. She was, he noticed, always gentle and unselfish with Evelyn, always ready to wait upon him hand and foot, to read aloud to him, or to cook him special dishes for supper when he complained of the dull and monotonous food which came from the kitchen. At night she would sit and watch him, dressed in her modest best, her black head sleek as satin, a dusky glow on her olive cheeks, all the wildness, the turbulence, and the defiance gone from her eyes, which seemed beautiful even to Harry, now that they were at peace. Her best dress was a home-made affair of plain white muslin, but when she wore it, seated by the hearth, so that the firelight cast flickering, dappled, elvish shadows upon the cloud of white draperies and upon her honey-coloured arms and bosom, it seemed to the other two that Evelyn must be an iceberg not to realise how much youth and vitality and warm-hearted devotion were his for the asking.

And indeed, as he sat dreaming over the fire, pretending to listen to the murmur of Camila’s voice, he appeared no ordinary mortal, but one who had been bewitched by the snow-queen and whose heart had once been turned into a lump of ice. His cold ethereal beauty seemed every day more remote ; where his thoughts were no one could say, save that they were not with Camila. Nor did he appear to notice her affection for him, or, if he did, he took it for granted, amiably, as he did everything, but with a graceful inhuman passivity that repelled.

Richard, coming home after three weeks' absence, found, to his satisfaction, that this strange, ethereal love affair had made no progress whatever. Camila, he noticed, seemed sincerely glad to see him, and was apparently willing to resume their old careless friendship, but he would have none of this, for he was still unable to forgive her. Deliberately, ostentatiously, he went as often as possible to Jennifer's cottage, but he was still sorry for Harriet, and visited her occasionally, patiently enduring her rebuffs.

It was February.

There were floods on the moor, where the last drifts had melted, and the air was fresh and damp with the breezes of early spring. In the gardens of Colerreddy were snow-drops, swan-white clumps of young and tender buds, and in the morning a blackbird sang like a pagan angel in one of the fir-trees, and here and there, in the lonely hamlets, the old folk crept painfully to their cottage doors to stare forth incredulous upon an earth in which seed stirred and from which at last the snow and frost had gone. Winter was over, the bitter, pitiless winter ; soon there would be lambs out on the moor and young corn sprouting up and green buds bursting from the trees. Spring once more ! They rubbed their eyes, fearful that they were dreaming, as they had so often dreamed during the hard weary months ; they had never thought to see another spring.

Lambing at Pinetree was tedious work for Harry and Evelyn, who were sometimes away all night. It was during one of these spells that Evelyn succeeded in awakening from his cold enchantment. He and Harry were working in shifts, and Harry was to relieve him at three o'clock in the morning. A few minutes before the hour, Evelyn, lantern in hand, came back to the rick-yard from the shepherd's hut on the other side of the coppice. The night was cold and still ; here and there the sky was stabbed with stars, and a mass of clouds drifted across the moon until all that could be seen of her was a pale luminous blotch that turned the row of hayricks into a mushroom village of squat black

cottages. An owl called sadly from the branches of an elm-tree near by ; away by the coppice a fox barked ; Evelyn, thinking of the lambs, wished that his brother would come. At last, in the distance, he heard the clip-clop of hooves ; a few minutes later he caught sight of Harry's lantern, a blur of lemon light. Evelyn waited patiently in silence, until Harry rode into the yard and flung himself off his pony.

"Give me the bridle," he called, "and I'll put her in to save time."

Harry came forward to meet him, the lantern swinging in one hand while the other trailed his reins, and the pony followed, docile, snuffing through its nostrils.

"Evelyn, listen."

"What's the matter ? "

"Something has happened up at Colerreddy. It's Camila."

"Camila ? " Evelyn repeated in astonishment, "what has she done ? Not hurt herself—— ? "

"No. But she has gone."

"Gone where ? "

"No one knows, but she is with the Egyptians."

"What nonsense ! She hates them. Tell me the truth, where is she ? " His voice became anxious.

Harry explained, while they opened the stable door.

"This evening, after supper, when Camila was in the kitchen, Prudence says there came a knock at the back-door. She opened it, and found a dark man, a gypsy, who said he wanted to speak to Camila. Camila went to the door and came back and cried and said the man was her brother and she must go with him, because her mother lay ill and wanted to see her. She took her cloak and went at once. The gypsy had a cart ; they were soon out of sight."

Evelyn stared at his brother.

"And you let her go with this man like that, alone ? "

"Was it my business ? Is Camila my friend ? "

"What did papa say?" Evelyn demanded.

"He laughed and said something about the call of the blood. Why gape as though the end of the world had come? She'll be back to-morrow."

"Camila's family went to America," said Evelyn, frowning.

"So they said. Who is to prove that they sailed?"

"What road did she take?"

"The road to Drizzle Combe."

"I shall go and look for her."

"Then you're mad," said Harry, "and I'll wish you good night."

Evelyn saddled his pony in silence.

For the first time in his selfish, shallow life he was violently torn by a fierce anxiety that was partly jealousy, although he did not know this. Since childhood he had been accustomed to take Camila for granted simply because she had always been there to worship and obey him, and the mere fact of her disappearance with another man, a stranger, set loose in him a curious storm of passionate feeling. How dared she embark upon such a wild errand without waiting to consult him? Furthermore, in the most secret and sensitive part of what he would have called his soul he felt instinctively that she was in danger, and he was afraid. He rode out of the yard and took the packhorse trail that skirted Monk's Tor and led across the moor to Drizzle Combe.

As usual, it was dark and gloomy out in the wasteland during that chill hour before dawn. It was as though he rode a magic horse across the blackness of a vast and fathomless ocean; even the low sighing of the wind sounded like the dull roar of the sea, of waves breaking upon a wild and rugged coast; the faint cries of night-birds, wheeling in the air above his head, seemed like the chanting of seagulls, clamouring above some desolate and long-forgotten shore.

Once his pony shied and nearly threw him; on the road

before him a mare lay snuggled asleep with a new-born foal. Once he passed two shepherds, out early, knapsacks on their backs ; when he shouted for news of the gypsies they started aside in terror, for on his grey pony, with his pale wild face and cloud of fair hair, he looked scarcely mortal, and at first they took him for the King of Elf-land.

They had seen no gypsies.

At Drizzle Combe he received the same answer to his question.

He now knew terror in all its ugly hopelessness, yet it was a selfish terror, for he began to realise, with horrible clarity, what life at Colerreddy would be without Camila. He thought that he must love her, since already he missed her so much, and he swore that when he found her he would kiss her, for surely this would give her pleasure. Indeed, he began to wonder why he had never really kissed her before, and he called himself a fool, convinced that he had missed much sweetness and delight. It was typical of Evelyn that even now he never once considered Camila's feelings. He took it for granted that she would like to be kissed by him ; he was incapable of realising that, if this were true, she must in the past have suffered greatly from his indifference.

Soon it was dawn, and great streaks of rose and amber barred the sky. The light, now bluish, was cold and dismal ; the mist hung across the horizon like walls of white wool ; cobwebs were spread like silver lace upon the gorse bushes ; in the distance he could hear the bleating of sheep and the splashing tinkle of a hidden waterfall. A few drops of rain began to fall.

Evelyn was weary and disconsolate and chilled to the bone. He put the reins on his pony's mane, and the wise animal, exhausted, turned gratefully in the direction of Colerreddy. After a few miles the house loomed towards him out of the mist, and at the gates he almost collided with another horseman—Harry, returning from the farm for breakfast.

“ Did you find her ? ” Harry demanded.

"No," said Evelyn. His face was white and anguished, and his brother became instantly inquisitive.

"She'll come back to-day for her dinner," he said cynically.


"No," replied Evelyn, shaking his head. He added, half to himself: "I don't suppose she will ever come back now. Perhaps we were all too much asleep at Colerreddy to notice how beautiful she was. And so the gypsies have taken her. Why should she ever come back?"

Harry stared stupidly, unable to comprehend this almost hysterical grief on the part of one who had never been quite a human being, like his fellows, who had always remained persistently aloof from all emotion, apparently content in his serene and callous isolation from love and hatred, suffering, and passion. Evelyn had all his life worn his indifference gaily, like a splendid armour; now, suddenly, this armour was stripped from him, and he was left defenceless, having no weapons.

"We are both hungry," said Harry at length, "and whether Camila is lost or not is no reason why we should starve. Come with me to the kitchen and get your breakfast."

Evelyn followed him obediently. In the passage he said suddenly:

"I shall search for her every day on the moors, and I will never rest till I find her."



CHAPTER XXVIII

Evelyn had been right when he had announced that Camila would not, as everyone supposed, return in a day or two. A week passed, and then a month, three months, six. Soon it was summer, and the corn was ash-gold, and the blossoming bells of the heather swept the moorland with a purple mantle, and still she had not returned, nor had she written.

At first Evelyn was inconsolable. Having at last awakened from his strange trance, he threw himself into the luxury of suffering with a fuller abandonment to misery than either his brother or his sister would have thought possible. He could not eat, he could not sleep. He ranged the moors until he returned home exhausted. At night he sat hunched up before the fire with his head in his hands. After three months, however, he seemed to have decided either that Camila was dead, or that she would never return, and he no longer searched for her upon the fens, nor did he any longer starve himself, nor toss all night upon his pillow. Slowly, reluctantly, he returned to his normal habits of life, but he was still melancholy, for with his indifference he had lost, not only his sweet temper, but also much of his gaiety. He was silent, and sometimes irritable, yet at night he still gazed admiringly at his own image in the mirror, and indeed he was more beautiful in his grief, paler, more interesting and romantic, he thought, now that he was sorrowful ; and although his heart had thawed, he looked more than ever like some being from the land of faery, and young women, meeting him out on the moor, or riding through their villages, thought him lovely enough to die for. He annoyed Harry by wearing black when he was not at

work, and, even more, by never smiling. The young Duke of Reichstadt, Napoleon II., had died not long before, and Evelyn, who had of late been reading of this charming puppet, had immediately detected a resemblance between them ; but Harry, who could not be supposed to know this, thought it indecent and ridiculous to wear black for someone who was most probably alive and who might at any moment come back.

"When she's tired of her gypsy lover," he thought, and laughed to himself.

Meanwhile, he was surprised by the calm with which Richard supported a loss that must, Harry thought, be more unbearable for him than for Evelyn. His father, he knew, had loved the gypsy for the last year, whereas Evelyn had discovered her enchantment only after her disappearance ; yet Richard remained placid and urbane, eating heartily, sleeping peacefully, while Evelyn posed about the house with his black cravat and his mournful face, until Harry found him unbearable and longed to hit him.

Harriet, of course, frankly rejoiced in the gypsy's inexplicable absence—indeed, it seemed to have taken years from her age. Frequently, as Prudence brushed her hair at night, she would laugh to herself and observe to her abigail how she had known all along that the girl was wanton and would one day run off to her kind.

Summer passed, bringing with it no sign of Camila. In the village it was said either that she had been made away with by the Lovells or else that the dark man who had come to fetch her was none other than Old Nick himself, and that the ground had immediately afterwards opened to consume them, with much fire and brimstone.

Mr. O'Shea, a kindly man, was disturbed both by the girl's unaccountable disappearance and by Evelyn's pale, melancholy face. It seemed to him that the boy, in spite of his affectations, was genuinely wretched, and on Sundays he would invite the brothers to sup with him at the Parsonage,

where he gave them good wine and treated them as equals. In the autumn, however, when at night there was frost scattered like stardust on the heather and ripe apples clustered red and yellow, weighing down the branches of the trees, Lance Neville came to visit his uncle, and Harry, who hated him, refused any longer to stir abroad on Sundays.

Lance had grown into a tall, elegant, languid young man, with white hands, luxuriant chestnut side-whiskers, and a foppish taste in clothes. He enchanted Evelyn by immediately discovering in him a resemblance to the portraits of Napoleon II., and perhaps he really saw some romance and pathos in this pale, beautiful boy who lived amid the wildness of the moors with a scoundrelly father and a mad mother, and whose love for a faithless gypsy girl so tragically consumed him. The two struck up a friendship. They studied poetry together, and talked much of Byron, whom they both admired fervently. Lance often told Evelyn how sad it was to see such a delicate and fastidious soul employed in manual labour and, indeed, doing the daily work of a common farm-hand. Presently, becoming further inspired, they wrote poems to one another, which, worthless as they were, gained a certain flavour of romance from being posted in the Pixies' Cave of Monk's Tor. Lance was always pressing Evelyn to come back with him to Bath, but Evelyn refused, sadly and quietly.

"I can never leave Colerreddy until Camila comes home. Just think, Lance, if she arrived when I was visiting with you !"

In reality, however, he had other reasons for refusing his friend's invitation. He was intelligent enough to realise that here at Monk's Tor, against a swarthy moorland background, he could pose successfully as a Young Romantic almost too beautiful to live ; in Bath, among Lance's fine friends, he might appear as nothing more *éclatant* than an awkward countrified boy. In spite of many temptations, he clung to the familiar surroundings in which he was at home,

and devoted himself to making the most of the advantages that were his.

"Do you think," he would ask wearily, "that your uncle would permit me to sup with him to-night?"

"How absurd you are!" Lance would assure him. "On the contrary, if you don't come, I shall yawn myself sick and die of boredom before ten o'clock."

"I invite myself only because at times my home becomes impossible. Try to imagine it, Lance! My father snoring, his hands folded on his belly; my mother upstairs, pacing her room and screaming abuse at all of us; Harry glowering at me, ill-tempered as a sick bear, with clothes smelling of earth and dung."

"And Celia?" enquired Lance suddenly.

"Celia? Oh, Missy sews, and turns up her nose at all of us, and bickers with Harry, and then the wind gets up, and the rats scuffle, and the ghosts walk. That, Lance, is an evening at Colerreddy."

"I admire your fortitude."

"Oh, I have become indifferent," said Evelyn untruthfully; "besides, I have a presentiment that I shall not live long, so I have ceased to feel misery at anything that may happen to me. Indeed, when Camila left me, something within me perished, and has never lived again."

He was pleased with this latest creative effort, and he was annoyed when Lance, ignoring it, remarked thoughtfully:

"I think often of Celia, Evelyn. Hers is no life for a young girl."

"Celia is perfectly happy." Evelyn told him hastily; "my mother is gentle with her, and Harry makes her his favourite, and my father seems fond of her. With Camila and myself it was different; we had only one another."


Lance had at first been much intrigued by the mysterious gypsy girl, whom he remembered as a child; but during the past week he had heard quite enough of her, for Evelyn, save when he was speaking of himself, talked only of

Camila and of the attachment between them which had by this time grown, in his mind, to the proportions of one of the world's great romances ; besides, Lance was hungry, and wanted his supper.

They repaired to the Parsonage, where Evelyn, remembering Byron, was careful to refuse every substantial dish. On his way home he produced from his pocket a large portion of bread and cheese, which he devoured with every sign of healthy appetite. He returned home well satisfied with his evening, for Mr. O'Shea, carving a plump goose, had peered anxiously at him over the top of his spectacles during the remainder of the meal. Yet Evelyn, as he let himself in at the back door of Coleruddy, had no particular reasons for feeling contented ; his friend, had he only known it, was to prove himself (in Evelyn's own phrase) ignoble.

When he got home, he found that, in spite of the late hour, Celia was sewing before the fire. She looked at him fixedly and asked if he had enjoyed himself. On being firmly answered in the negative, she paid no further attention to him. Evelyn warmed his hands, sighing ; a lock of shining hair tumbled before his eyes, and he swept it back impatiently, smoothing his unruly curls while he pondered, well pleased, upon Lance's enthusiastic and sympathetic friendship.

Camila's enchanted statue had indeed awakened, stepping from the pale heights of its pedestal into all the turmoil and fever of life. Who shall say that when it slept it had not been more beautiful ?



CHAPTER XXIX

Celia sat before her dressing-table in the room which, since Camila's disappearance, had become her very own. The door was locked, the curtains drawn, and a pair of candles burned upon the dressing-table. She wore her best dress of white India muslin with a rose-coloured sash ; she had clasped about her throat a necklace of sham pearls bought two years ago from a pedlar, and she had dressed her chestnut-gold hair in bunches of curls that revealed enticingly the tip of each rose-pink ear. She had performed all these major operations after hearing the slam of Evelyn's bedroom door, and she was well aware that she looked graceful and handsome and at least twenty, if not twenty-one. Now she waited, and she passed the time by reading and re-reading a letter produced from some secret and mysterious hiding-place in her bosom.

This was the letter :

“ MY OWN AND DEAREST,

“ It is already three days since last I saw you out by the Tor and already I am thirsting for you so that the hours drag by interminably and at least a century elapses between each tick of the clock. Will you, my dearest Celia, consent to what may seem to you an act of imprudence—will you wait up for me this evening until Midnight and then, when your family are asleep, admit me into the house that I may discuss with you a matter of some importance ? I make this request because our snatched secret meetings on the moor are far from satisfactory ; the weather is inclement and I fear for your health ; shepherds pass to and fro who might gossip to my uncle ; your brothers, too, are often in this locality and indeed

our brief moments together are always fraught with some peril or other.

“ Because, therefore, I must talk to you alone and undisturbed, I entreat you to consent to this meeting at Colerreddy. Beloved Celia, be merciful ! At Midnight I will whistle beneath your window ; if you are disposed to receive me, come down to open the door. This is the last letter I dare to place in the cave, as Evelyn knows our hiding-place and I shall be in torment if my angel refuses to grant me even a few moments.

“ Your own devoted

“ LANCE.”

Each time she read this letter she liked it better. From her short experience of life it seemed to her almost miraculous that a creature so unimaginative as man should be able to write to her with what she considered to be such tenderness and beauty. She thought of the men she knew—her father, heavy, stupid, morose, Evelyn, petulant and shallow, Harry, glum and surly—and tried to picture any of these telling a woman that they thirsted for her so that time stood still and a century elapsed between each tick of the clock. She failed, of course, because she was able only to view them as part of her family, never with the detached eye of practical experience. She did not know of the dark discord sown by Camila in the hearts of Richard and Evelyn and would not have understood it if she had. Hers was a simple character, limited, narrow, and commonplace ; she longed for ordinary things, balls, gossip, pretty dresses, and above all sane and normal and respectable affection. None of these existed in her life, and she needed them all. Storms of passion were not for her, nor the darkness of revenge, nor yet the wild exulting happiness of primitive natures ; she was incapable of such powerful emotions. She wanted, pathetically enough, considering her environment, to look pretty and to be liked. Lance Neville, consequently, who was attached to her, she supposed, because her appearance

pleased him, satisfied her every need, and her heart warmed to his ardent compliments. She glanced at her watch, and noticed that it was five minutes to twelve.

Swiftly, imitating her mother, she dusted her face with powder. Her reflection met her gaze blithely, eyes beaming, lips curving in a laugh of half-unconscious admiration, cheeks glowing like fruit upon which the sun has smiled. She was charming, because she was young and happy and vivacious and in love. And as she looked so gaily into the mirror, there came very faintly from outside the twice repeated sound of a whistle,—a soft whistle, ghostly and wavering.

The journey down the dark stairs into the hall was an adventure, for she must pass Richard's door, and beneath it glimmered a ribbon of light. Once a board creaked, and twice she heard the scurrying of mice, and was terrified, for she thought at once of Great Aunt Adelaide. She unbolted the front door, a rush of wet wind leaped in, a handful of whirling leaves, and Lance. He kissed her at once—never before had he been so bold. As his arms closed about her, she felt the beauty of protection, security, love.

"Look," she said, "You've blown my candle out."

"One moment, and I'll light another."

The tiny trembling light struck wan upon their faces, binding them close together in a world of darkness and danger and creaking mystery.

"Come into the dining-room," she whispered, "there is still some fire left and we can talk there without fear of being overheard."

He obeyed, and she lit the sconce of half-burned candles while he flung a log on to the fire.

"Now," she said, "I received your very dear letter, as you can guess, and read it many times. You spoke of some matter of importance——"

"I can only talk to you, Celia, when you come to sit near me. All our lives we have been so far apart—this is our first moment together. Please, Celia!"

"Very well. You see I am all obedience."

He laid his cheek against the brightness of her hair.

"What a strange, unhappy house this is!" he said suddenly. "Of all the people in it you are the only one who seems free from some evil spell. It's as though I found a snowdrop close to where toadstools grow."

"In the woods such miracles are not impossible."

"Do you like this house, Celia, and the moor, and your mad family?"

"Not very much."

"Would you like to leave them?"

"I don't think it would break my heart."

"But you like *me*?"

She smiled.

"Do you know why I've come to-night?"

"To see me, I suppose?" she said innocently.

"There's another reason as well," he told her, "I've come to take you away with me."

"Dear me!" She was so surprised that she sat up and gazed at him. "Is this—do you mean—what sort of proposal is it, exactly, that you're making to me? Do you want me as a mistress, Lance, or as a wife?"

"As both, of course." And as she looked perplexed, he explained: "I want to marry you, Celia. And I love you so much that I want you to come away with me now, to-night."

She was silent.

"Listen," he urged. "I have stolen, or rather borrowed, my uncle's cob. If we ride all night, we should be at Plymouth by dawn. There I'll take a chaise, on our way to Bath. At the next town we will wait until we can be married—it should be but a few days. Then to Bath, and my home, as my wife. What do you say to my plans, Celia?"

"But why so secret?"

He did not like to tell her how much his family would object to a marriage between himself and the daughter of Richard Lovell. He said instead:

"Because, if we asked my uncle to marry us, he would

make a to-do and send for my mother. My way is more romantic—a real elopement.”

She enquired, looking troubled :

“ Do you think your mother will like me, Lance ? ”

“ I am sure she will,” he answered, warmly, and indeed he felt that he was speaking the truth, for with her fresh and charming face, her graceful prettiness, and her gentle voice, he was certain that nobody, not even his mother, could resist her for more than five minutes. He could find in her nothing that was not adorable ; for with her love she seemed to have lost her petulance, her light selfishness, her foolish little conceits. Though everything had been against her, she was none the less the one being at Colerreddy to emerge untainted. Somehow, God alone knew how, she had managed to retain a certain shy purity, whereas the others, he thought confusedly, gave the impression of having been born wanton and cunning, passionate and wilful. Evelyn, for instance.

“ Do you know,” he asked her suddenly, “ what first made me love you ? ” And as she shook her head, he explained, “ It was your resemblance to Evelyn.”

“ I don’t understand what you mean.”

“ It was because he failed in everything. When I first came here, Celia, I thought Evelyn beautiful and tragic and brave—all that a friend should be. Then, when I came to know him better, I saw that he was only play-acting, a sham from beginning to end, and I was angry, although I pretended not to show it, at having been deceived. Then I looked at you, and found at once all the qualities—and more—I had thought to find in him. I understood then, for I have been very stupid, that he was only a wan and feeble reflection of yourself, without your tenderness, your sincerity, your courage, your brave and loving heart. There ! Now that I have made you such a pretty speech, will you consent to come away with me ? ”

“ Do you feel, Lance, that if I said ‘ No,’ your heart might possibly stop beating ? ”

"It would, for I'd fling myself in the mere."

"Then," she told him gravely, "I must at all costs avoid such a catastrophe."

"That means that you'll come? My sweet Celia!"

"I'll go upstairs now," she told him, "and pack a few necessities in a bundle such as pedlars carry out there on the moor, and then I'll fetch my cloak. Will you object to your bride looking like a pedlar's woman, Lance?"

"On the contrary, I shall adore it."

"I'll not be long."

And she was not, although he thought that he had waited for a hundred years.

"Lance," she said, when she joined him once more, "I've put a letter beneath my father's door telling him of my elopement—just in those words. And upstairs I thought of something. We mustn't steal your uncle's pony. Poor man, he prizes it so much!"

Lance, however, was at the moment incapable of considering his uncle, being too pre-occupied with his own problems.

"I've made arrangements," he told her carelessly. "When we reach the town, I'll send it back with a hostler to the Parsonage. And now, my angel, we must go."

"Am I riding pillion?"

He nodded, too awe-struck by his own good fortune even to speak.

"You think of everything, Lance."

And as he continued to gaze at her, feasting his eyes on her cool virginal charms, she at length brought him back to earth:

"Let us be off, then. Harry gets up very early—soon it will be dawn."

Struck by her serenity in face of such an adventure, her calm resolution, her eagerness for departure, he asked her:

"Have you no regrets, Celia, at leaving Coleruddy, perhaps for the last time?"

"Regrets? No. I am sorry for Harry, because I think

that he may miss me. But the others, why should I regret them? I don't love them, nor they me. Never, until this moment, have I been happy, as I now understand happiness."

He laughed, well pleased.

"Come, then."

She wrapped herself, nun-like, in her cloak, and he took her bundle from her. They let themselves out of the front door, closing it gently behind them. A squall of wind blew Celia's hair before her face.

"This way," he whispered.

At the gate, munching gloomily, waited the stocky roan cob that was the joy of Mr. O'Shea's heart.

In a moment he was in the saddle, and she seated herself behind him, hugging her bundle. Lance made a clicking noise with his tongue, and the placid animal started forth obediently. Their great adventure had begun.

It was dark on the moor, for the moon, a mere elvish sickle, slipped constantly behind a sombre screen of lowering clouds. Here and there an owl cried drearily, and the night, otherwise so silky quiet, was filled with mysterious little murmuring sounds.

"Suppose," she said, half-laughing, "the Elf-King steals us before we reach the town?"

"The Elf-King," he informed her, "is powerless to separate true lovers."

"I'm glad," and she pillowed her cheek against his shoulder.

They rode on. The world, they thought, lay ahead of them like some far-away enchanted land. Soon, very soon, they would slip through faery gates and be for ever together. Of the disadvantages of marriage, of irate parents, disapproving lawyers, unpaid bills, childbirth, unfaithfulness, they very wisely thought not at all. Soon it was dawn, and then they rode through the white mists of heaven.

CHAPTER XXX

Evelyn and Mr. O'Shea were the two who appeared to object more strongly than anyone to the marriage of Celia and Lance. Evelyn, of course, was outraged, humiliated, by the falseness of this friend who, by simulating affection for himself, had wormed himself so treacherously into the confidence of the shameless Celia. As for Mr. O'Shea, he was frightened of his sister and quite horrified to contemplate the violent indignation with which she would be certain to receive the news of the elopement. He reflected gloomily that he would undoubtedly be blamed, and indeed he felt himself that he must have been almost criminally unobservant. Amelia, in any case, would certainly say as much. In addition to everything else, he was seriously annoyed by the impudence with which Lance had appropriated his pony.

It was, however, too late to stop the lovers, for they were not caught until they were half-way through their wedding-breakfast, which they were eating with every sign of healthy enjoyment. Lance was of age ; there was apparently no redress for his hysterical mother. And all this, Mr. O'Shea informed her timorously, came of spoiling the boy and filling his pockets with money, to which she replied with a snort of contempt. It was not, the parson courageously persisted, as though the Nevilles were rich ; for they were not rich at all, though they were in comfortable circumstances, Lance's father having been during his lifetime what was commonly known as a Nabob, although certainly a Nabob of a very humble degree. Mrs. Neville, an angular sallow woman in iron-grey taffeta, here riposted by enquiring further as to the exact status of Celia's family. She began

by observing that the father, she understood, was an impoverished country squire with an unsavoury reputation.

The first part of this statement, Mr. O'Shea agreed mildly, was certainly true.

Mrs. Neville grunted once more. She had, it appeared, heard stories. Dark, fearsome, evil stories, of gambling and cheating and social ostracism, and, worse even than these, stories of witchcraft and debauchery and fornication with robber women and gypsies and riff-raff collected from hedges and ditches. She talked of madness, of hereditary taints, of squalid poverty, of a consumptive brother and an illegitimate gypsy sister and a peasant mistress, who lived in the house with her brood of children and kept the insane legitimate wife shut up in an attic, where she screamed from dawn to sundown, imploring release.

Mr. O'Shea was happily able to deny the majority of these legends. The bare truth, however, was ugly enough. Mrs. Neville, with her genteel acquaintances, her backgammon, her carriage, her musical evenings, and her neat orderly house, seemed utterly unable to contemplate relations of any kind with any member of the Lovell family.

Celia, Mr. O'Shea pleaded, was everything she should be, sensible and gentle, docile and chaste. He did not say that he had never liked her very much, having always in his secret heart preferred to her earnest gentility the unstudied lawlessness of her young relatives; but he did reiterate, with perfect truth, that he would be astonished if she did not make an excellent wife.

Mrs. Neville, however, continued adamant until the arrival of the bridal pair, who soon returned home unrepentant and almost irritatingly devoted to one another. Lance, bubbling like a kettle with connubial joy, seemed frankly unable to understand his mother's sense of grievance. Celia, on the contrary, was frightened almost out of her wits by the first respectable woman, with the exception of Prudence, that she had ever in her life encountered. Had she only known it, her modesty, her timidity, her bashful

blushes, and her meek demeanour were above all other demonstrations those calculated the most swiftly to thaw the cold aversion of her mother-in-law.

Celia was docile. She was biddable and humble and eager for a kind word. She gaped in childish admiration at the silver, the linen, the expensive shiny carriage ; at the three respectful, spotlessly clean servants ; at the preserve-closet, with every jar neatly and beautifully labelled;—even at the lap-dog, Tray, who was brushed and combed every morning by Mrs. Neville herself. Her unsophisticated delight in her surroundings finally disarmed her new kinswoman, and in a week's time Mrs. Neville was actually, and with enjoyment, giving her daughter-in-law lessons in house-keeping. Celia would rather have been instructed in the art of trimming bonnets, but she was too frightened to say so, even more frightened than she was of giving orders to the obese and formidable cook, who always made her feel rather a little girl of seven than a grown up married woman.

Soon Mrs. Neville took Celia calling with her. Wide-eyed, the girl wandered timorously about the decorous salons of Bath at the skirts of her mentor, who introduced her, graciously enough, to those whom she described in an audible whisper as the People who Count.

Celia thought them very singular people. There wasn't, she told Lance, one single pretty woman among them. They consisted mainly of gross, overfed matrons and angular genteel maiden ladies. There were also quite a number of very deaf old gentlemen in nankeen trousers (down which they invariably spilt snuff), to whom feminine tea-parties were the very breath of life. Celia, with her pretty face, her deferential manner, and her picturesque history, made an instant conquest of the People who Count.

She was astute, knowing instinctively that she must never talk of Colerreddy, of her brothers or Camila or the moor or Pinetree Farm, but prattled instead of Lance and his books and his nasty tobacco—here she grimaced—and the

new smoking-cap that she had been persuaded to make for him and the white kitten that he had given her and the drives they took round Bath and what a pleasing town it was. Sometimes, she said, they visited the ruins near by and then she took her sketch-book, for she was trying hard to improve her drawing, and Lance lay on his back with his pipe in his mouth and teased her about her perspective. As she talked and sipped her tea and shook her pretty bright ringlets, it seemed to her sometimes that Colerreddy, with all its gloom and wildness and rain and desolation had receded far, very far away, somewhere right into the back of her mind, where it would trouble her no more. For she had been right when she told Lance that she had no regrets, and she liked not only Bath but also the People who Count, and she had quite forgotten what it was like to play the hoyden on the moor and tear her gown and paddle in the stream and share her bed with a gypsy girl.

Winter passed and spring came again, and soon Celia's elderly female friends began to peer furtively, with a sort of obscene enjoyment, at the lines of her round young figure. Soon they chuckled to one another, enchanted that she was going to breed, for so they described it to one another with the coarseness that always lay dormant beneath their prim gentility. Old now, their own brief turbulent contact with life finished for ever, they seemed to take an intense and merciless pleasure in watching a younger woman endure the discomforts and hardships that once had been their lot.

Celia was immensely disturbed when Mrs. Neville, with much confusion and delicacy, finally hinted to her that she was about to become a mother.

"Oh, Lance, I'm going to have a baby. Whatever shall I do?"

He was slightly shocked by the abruptness of this announcement, having been brought up by his mother to understand that young wives only confided their more intimate secrets to their husbands with much blushing, whispering, simpering, and other imbecilities.

"Do?" he repeated rather stupidly.

"Yes. I wish so much that I was a little—a little less afraid. And you have always told me I had such a neat figure. I don't want to lose it. And, Lance"—here her voice sunk to a shocked whisper—"supposing, Lance, that the child favoured my family instead of yours? Supposing that it resembled my own father?"

That night, for the first time for many weeks, she dreamed once more of Coleruddy. Wild winds were roaming the moor and battling at the windows of the house, while out in the garden the sparse trees writhed like souls in torment. From the boys' room glimmered a light that glowed like a golden flower in the swirling darkness. And out on the fens, struggling against the terrific force of the gale, striving doggedly to reach the door, which meant the safety and comfort of home, trudged a female figure. Herself or Camila? And behind, bestriding as his steed the North Wind, beautiful, terrible, merciless, the Elf-King rode in close pursuit. He was gaining. It was impossible that he should not gain. And the friendly light, that once had seemed so near, now receded until it was no larger than a buttercup. Closer, closer beat the great pinions of the Elf-King. Celia screamed and woke up crying.

"Oh, Lance, I do wish I was not going to have a baby."

He soothed her tenderly, until she fell asleep, clasped in his arms. And in the morning her nightmare was forgotten, and she listened to the blunt, sensible advice of Mrs. Neville, and went to a card-party in the afternoon and bought a new bonnet trimmed with swansdown, and decided to make the best of the next eight months. Soon she decided that it was, after all, highly agreeable to be spoilt and cosseted. And she no longer dreamed of Coleruddy, but of her new friends, the dyspeptic old gentlemen in nankeen trousers, the vast, imposing matrons, the crushed, spiritless young girls, the spiteful, loquacious spinsters.

Bath had captured her, body and soul. Soon she began to embroider frocks for her child. It was winter, too, and

the big fires were pleasant and cosy, and Lance was infinitely kind to her, and sometimes the dyspeptic old gentlemen (who adored her to a man) sent her delightful gifts of posies and comfits, and the most important matron of all presented her with a shawl of fleecy whiteness, and then it was hard to say who was the more gratified, Celia or Mrs. Neville.

"A truly charming young woman," the most important matron murmured afterwards to the mother-in-law. "Who would have guessed her previous history to be so shocking?"

Who indeed? No one now would have been able to detect the wild duck among the barnyard fowls. For better or for worse, Celia had embraced respectability.

CHAPTER XXXI

A mild wet winter was succeeded at Colerreddy by a mild wet spring. On the moors all was bog and swamp and marsh and fen ; the air was soft and damp and enervating ; in the morning there were Scotch mists, like ghostly banks of nebulous white wool, and the rain drove down listlessly with a languid persistence which was worse than its accustomed fury.

Out at Pinetree the ewes were lambing. Harry and Evelyn worked tirelessly together, dour, silent, and exasperated. Sometimes, but rarely, they quarrelled, and then sulked like children, with this difference, that during their childhood they had never sulked. Now for days at a time they were hostile towards one another. Harry was glum and Evelyn petulant. Once they fought and Harry knocked his brother senseless. He was remorseful and apologetic.

" Evelyn, I lost my temper. Will you forgive me ? "

" I'll never forgive you."

" Oh, come now, don't be childish. I've apologised. Can I do more ? "

" I hate you."

" But why ? For one blow ? "

" No," said Evelyn, white-lipped, " I hate you for what you are. Yes, because you should have been a gentleman and you're nothing but an oafish ploughboy. You've degraded us all. Look at you now—your hands are black as coal, your clothes are darned, and your boots are thick with mud and dung. You look lower than an animal, and are more stupid."

" I can do two men's work if I please, while you soon get tired, like a woman."

"Yes, and you stink of the midden. I'd rather grow tired. At least, if I entered a drawing-room, I'd not disgrace the company."

"About all you are good for," sneered Harry.

One morning, a morning of fleecy mist and dove-grey sky and fine drizzling rain, Prudence, who had been attending to her mistress, went at length to the drawing-room armed with her duster. Harriet, after a day of tears and violence and hysterical recrimination, was at last asleep and would remain so for the remainder of the day. Richard, who had been grumbling at the din, was now shut in his study, fashioning rabbit-snares. Now, at last, Prudence was free to dust this sleeping long-forgotten room. She pulled the curtains, permitting the sad greyness of the weeping day to creep in slowly, like a feeble ghost, amongst the crowded cabinets and dark, dirty pictures. As she dusted, she thought of Harriet.

"Skin and bone, nothing but skin and bone, that's what she is. The Lord only knows why she has gone on so long. And he—what does he care, so long as her screams don't disturb him and he has his low friends down at the inn?"

And she dusted vigorously, ferociously, as though she were sweeping Richard out of his own house. Passing near the window, she cast a brief disapproving glance outside and observed a woman tramp slowly approaching the house. Vermin, ditch-skulkers! Well, they were always turned away unless the master was there to encourage them, and now he was safely shut in his own room. Tramps, indeed! Half the trouble in this sad old house, Prudence decided, was due to the master's perverted preference for low and disreputable company. Angrily, spitefully, she began to dust some glass paper-weights on a little table near the fireplace. These paper-weights, globular in shape, were artfully fashioned. Some looked as though they contained jumbles of brightly coloured sweetmeats, others of emerald glass, imprisoned ferns, and faery trees, and one boasted a set, frozen replica of the Duke of Wellington's head. It was

while she happened to be engaged in rubbing the dust from this last curiosity that she was disturbed by the sound of a faint and ghostly tapping. The window. Someone was outside the window.

She turned abruptly, duster and paper-weight still in her hand. The panes were so blurred with rain that she could see nothing and was forced to fling up the sash. Then, peering forth, she uttered a startled scream. Outside, intangible in the floating mist, stood the gypsy, Camila.

Prudence stared, horror-stricken, at this sinister spectacle. Camila seemed immensely tall, for she was swathed in a shabby cloak of poppy-red that reached to her ankles, and her black hair fell in a wild mane about her face and eyes.

"Let me in, Prue. I've been knocking long enough."

Prudence said nothing.

"Do you hear, Prue? I've been knocking a weary long time. Have you grown deaf during the last twelvemonth?"

Prudence thought then of Harriet, who had always hated this devil's spawn.

"Let you in? Never! Go back awhoring, if that's what you want, but leave this household in peace."

"If you don't let me in, I shall throw stones at the master's window. If he, too, has grown deaf, I shall smash in the panes."

"You'd never dare! And yet you're so bad, so wanton—go back, can't you, wherever you come from, and bring no more trouble to this house."

"Wanton, am I? Be careful, then, lest I become the new mistress here. And open the window wider—can't you see how hard it is raining?"

And as Prudence still clung obstinately to the sash, the gypsy sprang forward and with one swift, strong movement pushed her aside, leaping instantly into the room. There she stood for a moment, laughing contemptuously at the old woman's discomfiture.

"Take my cloak, Prue."

And she flung off the dripping garment, showing the torn and ragged brown dress that revealed her bare muddy legs and her shameless bosom. There was a necklace of red berries about her throat and sham gold rings dangling from her ears ; her feet were clad in rough sandals and her untidy coal-black hair was matted, knotted, filled with burrs and glistening with raindrops. She was taller, stronger, more robust ; and she was also insolent, self-confident, where once she had been civil and always ready to make herself agreeable. Now she was defiant, as the ill-used sometimes become.

" So you are not pleased to see me, Prue ? "

" That I'm not ! You're a hussy, and always were. And you've been living sinfully, I've no doubt, this last year. A fit companion for Harry and Evelyn ! "

" Where's Mr. Lovell ? "

" I'll not tell you."

" Then I'll search the house till I find him."

" Disturb the mistress if you dare, and I'll box your ears ! "

" I should not dream of looking for Mr. Lovell in her room. He's in his study, I suppose ? "

Prudence's formidable conscience not permitting even the mildest lie, she screwed up her mouth and revealed the truth immediately.

" I see he is," said Camila instantly, " and he and I have an account to settle."

Prudence, still thinking of Harriet, resolved upon desperate measures.

" Listen, before you go ! "

" What is it ? "

" If—if you need money, there is no need to pester him. I have some savings in my room, a good round sum of thirty-seven pounds. Not to be sneezed at, is it ? If you go at once, out of this window, back to the moors whence you came, without trying to see any of them, I'll give you thirty of these same sovereigns. Come now, take the money and go ! Just wait a moment, and I'll fetch it ! "

Camila asked sadly :

"Do you hate me so much, Prue ? "

"Hate ? " the old woman shuffled her feet. "Hate's a word I'm none too fond of. Oh, you were a bonny child, and I'll not deny it, but you're bred of Satan, like all your kind, and there's no place for you in this house."

"I might take your money and go. God knows I've needed money in the past. But I won't. You are under no obligation to me, Prue, and there's another that is. And I'll not go without seeing him. We have affairs to settle."

Prue asked confusedly :

"You're not—you're never so wanton that you're lusting after him, and he a gentleman with a wife and family ? "

"No. Indeed no. Sometimes, in the past, I have thought that if I saw him killed before my eyes, I would laugh, and spit upon his dead face, and curse him."

"Eh, but you're terrible sinful," Prudence complained fretfully.

"Perhaps. But let us talk of other matters. Are all the family the same ? "

"Miss Celia's married to the parson's nephew and lives in Bath. That dress you're wearing isn't barely decent."

"It's my best. So Celia married Lance ? How long ago ? "

"Eight or nine months, and no word of her since. And you're caking mud all over the carpet."

"I daresay. The rains are bad, out on the moor, and I've walked many miles since daylight. But don't worry, I'm going to the study now, and I'll not take your money, dear Prue, so don't think too badly of me."

"It's Her I'm thinking of," Prudence muttered gloomily, but Camila was already on the threshold and did not hear.

The passage was exactly the same—dark, draughty, and alive with mice. There was a wet patch on the wall, where the damp had begun to ooze through. She reached the study door and opened it without knocking. Richard, clad in his shabby dressing-gown, sat at his untidy table and

seemed absorbed in some wire loops that he was twining delicately in his fingers. He looked up when he saw her and gaped. In her wild ragged dress, with her bare legs and her red berries, she was as much a savage in the decaying luxury of his room as though she had been a Red Indian woman stepped straight from a tepee on to his threshold.


"Richard, I have come back, you see. Have you anything to say to me?"

He put down his bits of wire, but carefully, meticulously, as though he were afraid of disarranging them, and stared at her once more, perplexed, doubtful, shame-faced, half grinning in his acute discomfort.

"Camila, I—I am glad to see you once more. Pray sit down. You must be weary."

"I should be," she said, "after twelve months' hell."

She sat down.



CHAPTER XXXII

After a pause, he began cautiously : " Why did you stay away so long with your brother, Camila ? "

" Richard, you're talking like a child. Do you really suppose I never found out what you had done to me ? "

Beneath her accusing gaze he faltered.

" I ? What do you mean. What have I to do with your gypsy relatives ? "

" I can answer that," she told him, " —nothing. What you did was to bribe a gypsy man whom you once had met in London to abduct and seduce me and carry me off far away from all of you and Colerreddy. It may interest you to know that your directions were admirably obeyed, one and all."

" Such nonsense ! As if I—but your accusations are laughable, ridiculous."

" Are they ? Richard, after that night when you tried to kill your wife, you hated me, having before that loved me. You meant to revenge yourself, and you did. You need not trouble to lie—the man, Brazil, when he was drunk, as he was very frequently, told me everything. Indeed, after the first hour, I suspected. And then he took me, by the hedgeside, when it was raining, after he had been drinking at an inn. When I fought to resist him, he hit my face, and I saw that it was useless to rebel against him. And then he harnessed his swift pony, and bound my hands and feet and hid me beneath some sacking in his cart and took me far away, very far away, somewhere into Cornwall. When I was released from the cart, I fell down, being stiff from the ropes, which had cut my hands and feet. And then he fed me, and kissed me once more, until he was tired."

"Why did you not escape?"

"His mother," she explained wearily, "was like an old witch; she frightened me to death, and never left me for a moment when he was away. Once I ran off and lost myself on the heath, and then he found me, and beat me until I fell senseless on the ground. I never tried again—I had no money."

He stammered, turning his face away:

"I never—I never meant anything like that. I thought you might be content, with your own people. And I thought that you might one day tell Harriet what—what I tried to do in a moment of madness, and what I wept for in shame in the morning."

She shook her head.

"No. It wasn't that, Richard. It was because I refused myself to you, and it hurt your pride, since I was the gypsy you had taken in from charity."

"Camila, you do me an injustice."

"Would you like to hear about my life with these people?"

"No. I—you have no mercy. For God's sake——"

"All the same I'll tell you. Listen!"

She slipped to her knees and curled up before him, fixing him with her cold and sullen eyes.

"In Cornwall, Richard, we lived alone, the three of us, in a tent that leaked whenever it rained. We were hidden away, somewhere near a secret land, and his mother, Sarah Brazil, taught me to pick pockets and tell fortunes. Then, when the winter was over, we went about to fairs, and if I brought back less than a certain amount of money, he beat me. Once, when he had been drinking, he hit me with one of the stakes that built his tent, and I had a wound that bled and did not heal for many weeks. He jeered at me, and the old woman, too, for being a weakling, for shivering in the cold and crying out when he struck me. Once we went to London, and there, for three days, he locked me in a damp filthy attic, where at night the rats crept over my

body. I had only a crust of bread, and this I hid in my clothes, but the rats became so bold that at last I was afraid and flung it to them for fear they might take it. I've begged in the streets, Richard, and stolen turnips from the fields when I was hungry, and slept in ditches, and never for a moment was my body mine, but always his. And he never loved me. Sometimes I think he hated me, and I know I hated him. At first I rebelled and struggled against him, but soon, very soon, I grew humble and crawled at his feet. At night he made me take off his boots and in the mornings I had to lace them for him. Once I was clumsy, for my hands were cold, and then he kicked me and knocked out a tooth. Here, at the back of my mouth, is the gap. Look, I'll show you."

"For God's sake don't tell me any more."

"Why not? It was what you meant, wasn't it, when you sent him for me?"

"Camila, oh, Camila, one day, years ahead, if I do everything in my power for you, could you ever bring yourself to forgive me?"

Again she shook her head.

"I don't think so, ever. One doesn't, one can't, forget horrors of that kind."

"Is it true," he asked suddenly, "that you are in love with Evelyn?"

"No," she said listlessly, "once, long ago, I imagined I was, but afterwards I was too tired to think of him, and now I am in love with no one."

He watched her in silence. She noticed with a bitter amusement that big tears welled up into his eyes and rolled down his puffy cheeks. He was stunned, petrified, by the fruits of his vindictive mischief. Many times, brooding in his study, he had pictured her return, and she had always crept back broken, defenceless, not hard and defiant, as she actually was. Then, in his dream, he had taken her in his arms and been gentle with her and stroked her hair, and she had been glad to become his loving mistress. But now he

realised sadly that even if she had been willing, and he still thought that one so desolate might be persuaded, he himself had lost all his passion, his eagerness, his fierce desire for her. During that last year he had aged, and all that was youthful in him seemed to have perished. The ashes of his love for her were cold now, quenched by his loneliness, perhaps, or by his rheumatics, or his large paunch, or his lack of energy, or by his sickness, which was caused by steady drinking. Certainly there was no romance left in him ; and as he watched her through his blinding tears, so duskily handsome in her veil of black hair, there was no love for her in his heart save the affection he might have had for his own daughter. He pitied her—he was sick with pity—but he did not want to touch her, not even to take her hand. She had come too late, and that was his punishment for the misery that he had so wilfully inflicted upon her. She was talking, but he did not listen.

“ At the end of twelve months,” she told him, “ they let me go, as they had promised. He did not mind, being glad to be rid of me. I begged my way back here, taking weeks on the road. At night I slept beneath haystacks. Sometimes men asked me, but I would have nothing to do with them, being weary of all that. Last night, being tired to death, I slept on the moor, near to Drizzle Combe.”

“ Camila, oh, Camila, may God forgive me, for I can never forgive myself.”

“ I’m hungry,” she told him suddenly.

“ Hungry ? Wait one moment ! ”

And heaving himself out of his chair, he hastened towards the kitchen, intent on ordering her a savoury meal. He felt happier, swearing at the cook. At least he was doing something for this creature that he had destroyed.

Left alone in the study, she carelessly dried her hair before the fire. She was warm now and comfortable, for she had long ago grown used to hunger. Stretching herself like a young animal, she soon fell asleep before the ruddy blaze of the fire, her cheek pillowed on her hand. If only, she

thought just before she lost consciousness, if only they would all leave her, now that she was warm and sleepy, and perhaps later, hours later, bring her some bread and cheese.

She dozed.

And then, outside, came the patter of hurrying footsteps, as Evelyn flung himself impetuously into the room.

She was in his arms even before she was awake ; in a daze she lay passive, while he caressed her mouth and cheeks and hair ; she was warm and he had come in from the moors ; it was, she thought dreamily, as though she were being kissed by snowflakes. She made no resistance.

At last they started apart, to observe Harry lounging in the doorway, staring at them. Harry's face was impassive. Gently, for Evelyn had been so kind, Camila pushed him from her.

" Good day, Harry. You see the prodigal has returned."

" Good day, Camila."

" Oh ! " She was struck by a recollection of something that she had stored in her mind to tell them both, " Listen to me for one moment—last night I slept on the moor near Drizzle Combe, and as I lay on the heather, with my cloak as a blanket, I saw above my head the Wild Swan, the faery Wild Swan that flew above us when we were children near the Tor."

" You were dreaming," Evelyn suggested, and stroked her hand.

" No. Really, I was awake. It hung above my head so great and ghostly that for a moment I was afraid ; it was luminous, shedding from its outstretched wings a radiance like moonlight, but more brilliant."

" A phantom suggested by the moon," Evelyn told her.

She shook her head.

" The moon was hidden. The skies were overcast and very dark. I watched for some time, until it soared away, and then I felt happy and at peace, although I was cold and hungry."

Harry muttered : " I, too, saw the Wild Swan last night as I rode by the Tor."

But the others did not listen, and Evelyn at length addressed his brother.

" Harry, will you be kind and leave us ? I want to speak privately to Camila before papa comes back."

Harry left the room without a word.

" What is it ? " she asked.

" Only this ; that I worship you. I found it out too late, when you had gone, and then I think my heart nearly broke. I want only to love you and to serve you. You make me feel humble, because you are so great and beautiful, like a strong, splendid, dark angel, like some wild, victorious spirit from the moor, with hair and eyes of night and a voice that is sweet music. . . . Camila, let me marry you or become your lover—whatever you want, because I shall assuredly go mad unless I possess you, body and soul."

" Body ? My body means little enough to me at the moment. I am so weary, Evelyn, of being treated roughly. And my soul—I don't know or care if I have a soul—sometimes I hope I haven't."

" Camila, I love you so. Don't you think that you could also love me ? "

" I don't know. Once, perhaps, I could have loved you. Twelve months ago. But now I feel cold and tired, as though something within me were destroyed. And, Evelyn," here she hesitated, " you talk of marriage. Do you understand that a wild gypsy man took me against my will and did with me all that he pleased ? "

" Of course I understand. You gave him a little, that which you could not defend. But yourself—you never gave him yourself. What, then, does the other matter ? "

And he kissed her again. She made no protest, for he was young and adoring and pitiful, and she was tired to death. Once more she thought that his kisses were like snowflakes.

And then Richard, bringing food into the room, disturbed the pair.

PART IV

HARRY

CHAPTER XXXIII

Evelyn and Camila were married soon afterwards by Mr. O'Shea in the village church that sheltered the slumbering figures of long-forgotten crusaders. The ceremony over, the bride and bridegroom, seated in a hired chaise from the village, drove back to Coleruddy, where it was understood that a wedding breakfast awaited them. Evelyn at once imprisoned his wife's hand ; she smiled at him and clasped her own upon it.

" Kiss me," he commanded.

She obeyed.

" Are you as happy as I am, Camila ? "

" Not quite, I think," she replied frankly, " but I am happier than I have been for many a long day. There ! does that content you ? "

" No. But only wait, my dear. I am determined to make you the happiest woman on the moor. I shall let you want for nothing."

" Shall I be happier than Celia is with her fine bragging Lance ? "

" Indeed you shall. For one thing Celia has no more capacity for emotion than a marble statue. She needs only food, and a warm bed, and someone to tell her she is beautiful, which she is not. Secondly, Lance, her husband, is an overdressed ridiculous lout with an empty head. They are well suited."

He paused a moment, then enquired :

" Camila, my father is, I think, going to give me a present of money. Would you care for a wedding-trip to London ? "

"No, Evelyn. Please ! Don't think me ungrateful, but I assure you that it would make me happier to stay here at Colerreddy, with the moor at my gates. I would be so much more at peace than if we were travelling."

He answered, growing pink, "Very well. As you say. But you seem inclined to be fanciful, and I have always wanted to visit London."

"Later, then, if you wish. I'll go with you later. But Evelyn, I am so weary and in need of rest that I want only to stay here with you for the next few months. Besides, I would like to forget my last visit to London—it was not agreeable."

"Tell me about it."

"No."

"Why not ?"

"Because I have no wish to spoil our marriage-day. And those things were hideous. I want to blot them from my mind as though they had never happened."

"Please confide in me !" he entreated.

"I tell you, no. Don't let's fall out when we've been married but a few minutes. I hate the past so much that I cry about it sometimes even when I am asleep. Talking about it makes it still more vivid in my mind. I want to forget for ever—you shall teach me."

And he was kissing her when they drew up at the gates of Colerreddy.

Behind the chaise trotted the two horses ridden by Richard and Harry. At first, on leaving the village, they were silent. Richard was sorrowful. It seemed to him a shocking, a horrifying thought that his own mad passion for Camila should have burnt itself out so swiftly,—should have been extinguished as suddenly and as irrevocably as a breath of air puffs out a guttering candle. He was growing old—he had felt from the first no jealousy of Evelyn. He no longer wished to become Camila's lover ; had Harriet been dead, he would not for a moment have considered a second marriage. He sighed. Harry rode beside him, his

black head bent, his hands low on his pony's neck. Richard roused himself.

"A pity," he said sourly, "that you have such a dislike for your sister-in-law."

"A pity indeed."

"Yet she will make a fine wife, that wench. A breeder, too, I'll take my oath. You should have chosen her yourself."

"I've no mind for marriage."

Richard continued, inattentive :

"That brother of yours is soft. The gypsy will lead him by the nose. But you, now ! Ah, you'd have been well matched, you two, and you'd have got back from her as good as you gave. But what's the use of talking ? You've missed her, and you've always hated one another."

"She may hate me," Harry told him, raising his head, "but I have no longer any feelings about her. On the contrary, I see she has for a woman many admirable qualities—strength, endurance, courage. Celia, whom I loved as a child, was a doll compared with Camila. And she may make a man of Evelyn."

"Yes, or run off with the first dark-skinned pedlar that comes begging at the door !"

Harry said no more. He somehow felt gloomy and unhappy. After pondering for some time he attributed his depression to the fact that now that both his brother and sister were married, he would, in the future, be even more lonely than he had always been. And he would have to work harder. Evelyn, he felt, would be lazier than ever now that he had the gypsy to detain him with her feminine blandishments—her dark seductive eyes, the promise of her red lips, the murmur of her low musical voice. And he thought, with a sudden spiteful relish, that there was at least one virtue that this bride could not offer to her husband—the virtue of purity. That boast, at least, would not be Evelyn's. And he fell to musing on the many adventures that must have befallen her during her past life, and

wondered why she was so fiercely reticent on the subject of her wanderings with these wild outlandish people, who were never still for a moment, but always restless and ready to travel the roads of the world. Returning to Evelyn, he decided to let his brother feel his fists, if he began to neglect his work at Pinetree Farm. It was, he thought once more, exceedingly unjust that Celia should marry Lance, Evelyn Camila and himself no one. Richard, observing his long face, made a coarse jest.

Harry retorted :

" I had thought to see you sadder to-day, for I know that once you coveted the gypsy yourself."

" God damn your impudence ! Are you out of your mind ? What makes you think that a long-legged child would ever take my fancy ? And are you not aware that whenever I feel in the mood for such distraction, I can take my pick of the best-looking women in the village ? "

" What you should have been," Harry told him drily, " is the Sultan or the Great Moghul himself."

" And talking of women," said Richard, anxious to change the subject, " I pray to Heaven that your mother, who is fortunately kept to her room, will know nothing of this wedding for some weeks to come."

" She'll have to know some time."

" Perhaps, but I'll fend off that day as long as I can, and Prudence is to be trusted."

They turned in at the gates of Coleruddy.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

The wedding-breakfast was spread in the dining-room, which had been decorated with bunches of snowdrops picked during the morning by Lily Betts. The table was laden with cold fowls, cold pies, and a frosted white cake, produced by Prudence, upon which were inscribed in pink sugar the Christian names of the newly wedded pair.

Prudence was in a strangely confused state of mind. She thought Camila a sinner, a witch, and a fly-by-night, nor did she altogether approve of Evelyn; she had always said that he was spoiled. Yet she enjoyed a wedding, and she had had no opportunities for gratifying this enjoyment since the day, so long ago, when Harriet, her ewe-lamb, had stood, like some lovely blossoming tree, at the altar. She had been sorely disappointed by Celia's elopement, and now she was trying to reconcile her delighted excitement with the sinister past of the bride and with what she insincerely described to herself as the wickedness of keeping Harriet in ignorance of her son's marriage.

Soon the meal started. The farmer and his wife and the three servants sat down to eat with the bride and groom and Richard and Harry and Mr. O'Shea and his housekeeper. All went well, save for the palpable nervousness of Mrs. Marsden, the farmer's wife. "Pray the Lord," she murmured reverently, "as Enoch'll digest his food as a gentleman should and not shock the gentry and turn my face red with shame. Amen."

Richard began to pour out wine.

Camila had removed her veil and looked, with her shining blue-black plaits, her grave dark eyes, and her delicate tawny face, exactly as she had appeared in the old days

before she was stolen by the Egyptians. Glancing round the room, at the clusters of flowers, like wreaths of snow, at the spotless whiteness of the cake, and at her own fresh muslin dress, she soon began to feel that all this insistence upon an imaginary immaculateness was somewhat disconcerting,—indeed, distressing.

Richard, always at his best with those supposed to be his social inferiors, was now injecting life and vitality into the curious gathering. Even Prudence, sipping wine for the second time in her life, felt her nose grow pleasantly pink, while Mrs. Marsden gradually ceased watching her husband like a vigilant lynx. Even Mr. O'Shea, who had been exceedingly annoyed because it had never occurred to anyone to allow him to say grace, now swigged down some red wine and beamed upon the company like an elderly cherub. His dark forebodings had for the moment left him ; he thought no more of wildness and instability and rebellion, but saw instead two young and handsome people who must assuredly be in love with one another.

Camila, glancing at her husband, noticed once again how beautiful he was, with his pale angel's face and the close-curling rings of hair, fair as a daffodil, that made him seem like a young hero straight from the bright glamorous pages of mythology. To compare the two, she looked at Harry, brooding over his glass, an ebon lock tumbling before his eyes, his swarthy face expressionless as a mask. Suddenly, for she took but little notice of him, she observed that he seemed unhappy,—perhaps, she thought, because he had always distrusted her.

She called to him across the table.

" Harry ! Are you not going to drink my health ? "

He roused himself at once.

" Willingly," and he took up his glass, " here's a long married life for you, Camila, and happiness, and children."

" Now Evelyn's," she commanded.

" The same, of course, for Evelyn," he repeated.

Richard, a little tipsy, now rose to his feet and made an

extremely coarse speech, more suited, thought Mr. O'Shea, to some equine union in a particularly low racing-stable. The servants laughed loudly, and, much to Mrs. Marsden's horror, her husband began immediately to emit those sounds usually described by the genteel as hiccoughs.

"Be silent, will you, Enoch!" she besought him in a hissing whisper.

"I canna," he told her loudly, "the food and the wine 'as stuck together in me gorge and naught but belching can do 'em any good at all. Have patience, woman!"

Mrs. Marsden, her face magenta in its agony, at once subsided, writhing with discomfort. Mr. O'Shea, nobly stepping into the breach, stood up to make a brief and pleasant speech.

Then, for they had all eaten and drunk their fill, the wedding breakfast seemed to be over, and they wandered rather disconsolately into the drawing-room. Here were displayed their presents. Richard's present to Evelyn was fifty pounds, and to Camila a gold locket with a pearl drop, which she rather disliked because he knew that Jennifer Crowland possessed the twin to it. Harry gave his brother his most valuable heifer, and his gift to Camila was a gold bangle bought the day before from an itinerant pedlar. This was so unlike Harry that she must needs embrace him for it, and she remarked afterwards to her husband that it was like kissing a wooden image. Mr. O'Shea produced a watch-chain for the bridegroom (the only objection being that he had no watch to go on it) and a cameo brooch for the bride. Mrs. Marsden, quelling her husband, now at his worst, with a glacial eye, presented the happy pair with a sporting-print, said to be valuable, which had hung in the farm parlour for the last fifty years. Prudence came forward with a prayer-book, in which were inscribed the names of the bridal pair, and the other servants pushed into Camila's face a huge, wet, fragrant nosegay of pansy-tinted violets.

It was delightful, the bride thought, thus to be spoiled

and petted. Her only regret was that she could no longer feel the same eager, enchanted passion for her husband. That had been killed, destroyed entirely, by her master Brazil, with his blue unshaven chin, his roughness, and his evil taunts. Perhaps, she hoped, this feeling might not be dead, but only sleeping ; perhaps, later on, her love would bloom again, and then she would be able to give Evelyn everything, everything in the world that he wanted. Soon the Marsdens, entirely owing to the disgrace felt so keenly by Mrs. Marsden, took their departure back to Pinetree. Harry, observing that he had work to do, at once accompanied them, scarcely bothering to bid farewell to the bride and bridegroom. The younger servants departed unwillingly to the kitchen. Richard's head began to nod.

Prudence came mysteriously towards Camila.

"Miss—madam, I should say—I've moved all Evelyn's clothes into your bedroom. It's ready for you both."

"Oh. I never thought of that. Thank you, Prue. And, Prue, you might put the snowdrops and the violets in the room. I—we would like them there."

"I'll do it now, lest I forget."

Mr. O'Shea came up to take his leave.

"God bless you both. You are so young, the two of you, that it almost makes me sad, and I wish you many long years of contentment and happiness."

"Thank you," they said politely, like children.

Now they were left alone, for Richard was asleep. Evelyn began to pull at Camila's arm.

"No," she said. "I want some fresh air. Let's go for a walk on the moors."

"Good God, what an absurd idea."

"Please. I have a feeling that we might see the Wild Swan, and that would mean good fortune."

"Very well," he agreed, shrugging his shoulders.

She slipped on a cloak, and they walked across the grey windswept country towards the Pixies' Cave. They held one another's hands, and often he kissed her, but while lapwings

and curlews circled above their heads against the low and sullen clouds, of the Wild Swan there was no sign.

When they got home, the dusk had begun to flow gloomily about the house, and the lighted windows were like a row of jewels that sparkled before their eyes. As they entered the hall, a feeling of odd discomfort and constraint fell upon them both. They were like naughty children creeping back home all apprehensive of punishment. This feeling was strengthened by the prompt appearance of Prudence, candle in hand. Prudence, however, seemed benevolently inclined.

"Your tea's ready in the parlour. You'll be left alone, for the master's in his study and Master Harry's staying all night at the farm."

Into the drawing-room, always described by Prudence as the parlour, they wandered a little uneasily, being more accustomed to ferreting their food from the kitchen whenever they were hungry.

The drawing-room was in twilight, save for a cluster of impish dancing candles. In the grate burned a wood-fire, low, but bright as marigolds. Bars of red light flickered swiftly over sombre pictures and threw huge ink-black shadows upon the walls. On a small table near the fire was set a common brown teapot, cheap cups, a loaf of bread, a pat of butter, and a toasting fork. These objects were laid upon a priceless table-cloth of exquisite embroidery, now grown creamy-yellow with age.

"I'll make some toast," Evelyn suggested in a hushed voice.

She nodded assent, and, while he was so engaged, went over to the uncurtained windows to stare upon the darkening world. The garden was now deep dusky-grey, already flowing with the shadow of the great blackness soon to come; a sad, secretive wind rattled the branches of the swaying fir-trees, that were like grotesque witches learning the measures of a stately dance; the skies were overcast, yet in the furthest heavens, very far away, there twinkled

the brief candle of a remote and lonely star ; in the distance, out upon the moor, a fox barked wildly, calling to its mate, and Camila mused, for well she knew these sights and sounds.

For many months she had accustomed herself to sleeping in the sullen vastness of the open air, in all weathers—starlight or moonshine, rain or sleet. Nor had she been at peace, for always near her, cruel pinions outspread like a hawk's, had hovered the gypsy, Brazil.

And Brazil, by his brutality, his roughness, his savage insistence, had for ever, she thought, killed in her heart that tender love, sweet as blossoming flowers, that once she had felt for Evelyn, her husband. Coolly and mercilessly she considered her reasons for marriage. Safety. That was her real reason for consenting,—she had married for safety and for pity. But not for love, for there was no love in her heart, and this seemed bitter indeed to her who had once idolised him.

She glanced across at him, at the delicate beauty of his profile, at the fair elvish cloud of his hair. Yet, as she looked, nothing stirred in her heart, which still seemed to her dead or sleeping ; it was as though she glanced affectionately at a pretty child. Perhaps, later on, when they were really husband and wife, she might learn to love him. If not, she supposed that she had committed a grievous sin ; but she seemed incapable of remorse. Passionately, desperately, she needed safety :—now she had it.

Evelyn called over his shoulder :

“Your toast is ready. Why are you staring out of the window ?”

CHAPTER XXXV

She went to sit beside him on the low stool before the fire, where they snuggled like children, drinking together out of the same cup. She was not hungry, but she ate to please him. Sometimes he stroked her hair or kissed her cheek or put his arm about her shoulders, and she derived a vague comfort from these ministrations.

"I adore you," he said at length.

"I am so glad," she told him awkwardly, "and so proud."

"Camila, when you ran away, and I realised my love for the first time, I was mad, terrified, almost out of my mind."

"We mustn't think of that. Now, at last, we have one another."

"But you have suffered so terribly, and so have I."

"You?" she enquired in astonishment.

"But of course, through love of you."

"But why did you not love me when I was there waiting for you?"

"Who can say? These things are like spells and witchcraft. When you vanished it was as though I were touched by an enchanted wand."

She muttered, sighing:

"Then those who influence us with magic are evil, since all goes wrong."

"Camila!"

"What is it now?"

"What do you mean? Are we not married and bound to live happily ever after like the prince and princess in the faery-tale?"

OF

"Of course. I had forgotten that."

And as he stared at her in amazement, she flung her arms about his neck and kissed him, which so emboldened him that he at once suggested repairing to their bedroom.

"No," she protested, "it is only seven o'clock. We shall be laughed at by all the household."

"Damn the household."

"Let's do something for an hour or two—play cards or what you will."

He grumbled but at last consented, and so they played until the grandfather clock, hidden in a corner of the room, struck forth with a mellow gravity the hour of nine.

"Come along," he told her imperiously.

They tiptoed up the stairs, unable still to feel completely guiltless, and presently incarcerated themselves within the room once shared by Camila and Celia. Here, as a special treat, a peat fire burned, and on the mantelpiece was thrust a fragrant mass of mauve and snowy-white flowers gathered that morning in the gardens of Coleruddy.

"Look," she said, "my bridal snowdrops, and still fresh."

And then she glanced at the dressing-table, where it seemed so strange to see masculine brushes and combs.

"It's stuffy," she said, and went to fling open the windows.

"Really," he protested, "would you have me sleep all night in a draught?"

"Yes," she informed him, "if you sleep with me."

"But Camila, you are as Spartan as Harry! Don't you know that my chest is delicate?"

"I have not before heard talk of it."

"You are impossible! Do you want to kill me?"

"No. I want only to make you stronger."

"I refuse to sleep in a draught."

This question of open windows suddenly became to her one of tremendous gravity, one that perhaps might somehow influence their whole married life.

"I am used to fresh air," she told him stiffly. "I cannot do without it, if I am to keep my health. And this, being our wedding night, is a time to settle such small matters. If you shut that window, Evelyn, I must sleep elsewhere."

"A docile wife!" he grumbled, and then, for he was much in love, he suddenly smiled at her with all his charm.

"Very well, have it your own way, dearest. But if I wake sneezing, I think that we won't try the experiment again."

"I agree, for I know that you will wake feeling stronger even than—than Harry."

The argument was finished. Swiftly and in silence they undressed.

"Do you think," he asked suddenly, "that my mother and father on their bridal night felt happiness in any way to be compared with ours?"

Camila, unbinding her hair, tried without success to imagine Harriet as a bride.

"Perhaps Lance and Celia did," she suggested at last.

"Lance! For God's sake, Camila, don't mention that fool's name again!"

"But why do you hate him so?"

"Because I have no patience with people who are insincere and treacherous."

"But," she asked seriously, "was he ever treacherous to you?"

"Yes, I tell you! He pretended to be my friend in order to insinuate himself here the better to abduct Celia."

She could make nothing of this, but to appease him, she remarked with suitable gravity that Lance had undoubtedly behaved very badly. Then she began to brush her hair. The house was already very quiet, save for the creaking of passages, the scurrying of mice behind the wainscots, where their elfin highways ran, and the drowsy ticking of clocks. Evelyn came towards her, imprisoning her throat with his arms, and bent down to kiss her lips. She had a sudden panic—felt a strange, morbid, nervous terror—seemed to hear the gypsy, Brazil, creeping up from behind

to imprison her in his pitiless grip. Glancing desperately at the mirror, she was relieved to see reflected there the white, clear-cut face of Evelyn, with his close bright curls, like the petals of primroses.

"Oh, God," she thought, "why can I not love him as I used to do?"

As though the same thought had occurred to him, he sat down beside her on the floor and put his arms about her waist.

"Camila, will you tell me something?"

"You know I will. What is it?"

"Please answer me truthfully. It would hurt far more if you lied to me."

"Oh, what is it? I wish so much that you wouldn't ask me questions."

"This one question," he told her sternly, "and no more."

"Ask it, then."

He levelled upon her his great eyes of clear sea-grey that seemed to burn into her very soul.

"When this gypsy man took you for his mistress, did you hate him?"

"You *know* I did. Why insist on speaking of things that mean such unhappiness to me?"

"Camila, how long did you live with him?"

"Oh, we've talked of this so many times before. Eleven months, I think,—perhaps a year—I had no calendar, only the moon."

He continued remorselessly:

"At first, then, you hated him. But then, as the months passed—you were young, Camila, and strong, and more mature than English girls—tell me, as the months passed, were you not glad, in your secret heart, that you had a lover of your race?"

"No, I tell you, never. Can't you understand that I hated him always, with all my heart and soul? He was repulsive to me, and it is repulsive even now to talk of him, even to you. Evelyn, you must never speak to me of that twelve

months, if we are to be happy together. Never, never, never."

He said suddenly, his eyes enormous :

"You are not in love with me."

"I love you, and always have, since we were children together."

"But you are not in love with me any more as you were once, before you went away with the Egyptians."

"Perhaps it is not quite the same. But I wanted to marry you with all my heart. And I think that when we have been together for a little while, my love for you will return and be as strong as it was before."

"It will," he said defiantly, "you *shall* love me—I'll make you—I'll suffer no more through you, of that I'm determined."

"Then be gentle with me now. Teach me to forget the rough ways of those people I hate. Remember, Coleruddy is my home and you are my husband. In the past I loved you, not only for your good looks, but also for your gentleness. That's why," she continued pensively, "I fell out with Harry. Harry was always rough."

He commanded, as he had been wont to command when he was a baby:

"You are not to hate Harry. Harry's my brother. You and he must make friends."

"I don't hate him any more," she assured him, "He has been kind to me since I returned, and friendly, and thoughtful for my comfort. Indeed I don't hate him."

He murmured, stroking her hand :

"It was Celia who made difficulties between you both. Now that she has gone, our life will be more peaceful."

Later, when he blew out the candles and took her in his arms and smothered her with eager kisses, she felt impassive yet pitiful, as though he were a little boy, many years younger than herself, to whom she must be kind.

As morning came and he fell asleep, she wept at having tricked him, since she could not return this love of his, but

only suffer it ; and then she took his fair head in her arms and for a long time lay wakeful, until the dawn came, and with it the clamorous birds of spring, blackbirds and thrushes, the twittering of starlings and the mingled cries of wood-pigeon and cuckoo.

Then, for she was weary, she slept.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE next day Harriet discovered the secret of their wedding and threatened to kill herself. Richard, roused by Prudence, went into her room to shout abuse at her, whereupon she stuck her fingers in her ears and reiterated her determination to destroy herself.

"To think that I," she shrieked, "who am of the Shropshire Vernons, should so have demeaned myself as to have to call a tramping gypsy whore my daughter!"

Richard bellowed pugnaciously that Camila was a fine girl, handsome, vigorous, and chaste.

"You should know," she flung back at him, "having had both daughter and mother for your mistress. And then, tiring of her, you force her on your son."

The old argument had broken out once more.

He repeated stubbornly :

"I have never lain with gypsy women. How often must I tell you that? Are you so utterly destroyed by drink that you no longer understand when I am speaking the truth?"

She seemed able at least to hear him, in spite of the fingers thrust in her ears.

"The truth! You have never spoken the truth in your life. A liar, that's what you've always been, and a cheat, too, or we should never have been marooned here all our lives in this bog."

Once he would have been hot with anger at being so lashed by her spiteful tongue, but now, just as his love for Camila had waned and died, so also had his enmity for Harriet—he was indifferent to both. He would have pitied them, if he had not grown so inert he no longer even wanted to help the one or harm the other. The arrogant vitality of

youth was ebbing from his veins, steadily, pitilessly, like sand from an hour-glass, and now, when he stared at his own reflection in the silver-wreathed mirror on his dressing-table, he saw dimly behind his shoulder the shadow of something doddering, dried-up, mummified, which he watched with a sad resignation, for he knew it to be the spectre of his own old age. Sometimes, but rarely, he tried to bluster to himself :

“ I’ve had a fine life and a merry one, for all the grand people of London may say to the contrary. Even here, on the moors, in this frightful desolation that I have learned to love, I’ve led my own life as I have pleased, with none to preach at me.”

And he would think, then, of the horses that he had ridden, of the riffraff that he had befriended, of the women that he had possessed. A juggler’s wife at the hiring-fair, bold and blonde and loud of voice. The daughter of a Cornish pedlar, sixteen years of age, ravished out on the moors near the great Tor, shy, sullen, swarthy-dark. Harlots in London, painted like dolls, bedizened in bright crude colours, eager, accommodating, foul-tongued and mercenary. Jennifer Crowland, the herdsman’s wife, soft of voice, black-browed, with cheeks bright as apples. He had been fond of Jennifer, who had borne him a son and treated him obsequiously, but he never saw her now, and she meant no more to him than one who had long been dead. He thought, too, of Camila, aflame with all the dark allure of her race, most tantalising of all, since he had never captured her, and last of Harriet, in her maize-tinted dress, once so coolly and provokingly seductive.

Yet of all these women there remained nothing but the memory of their faces, and some of these were now very pale and ghost-like. None of them had left him any comfort ; yet when he rode abroad on the moors he could always find peace. The most ordinary sights now brought him consolation—an old nodding horse dragging a plough through stirring chunks of earth, the sleepy cawing of rooks clustering

like big plums in their favourite trees, a winter silhouette—some dark, delicate tracery of twigs and boughs against a cold calm sky of palest marigold. These, and the wind that sighed so quietly during the summer and raged in the storms of winter as though it would venture far, far away, perhaps to the very end of the world. He loved the moor, too, in all its moods, with all its vast and windswept spaces, its seas of rusty bracken, its glowing beacons that were blooming gorse-bushes, its slopes of heather, wine-dark and honey-scented, its hump-backed, worn grey tors and boulders. He loved to ride there even when rain slashed his face and the mist was a thick veil before his eyes and in his ears rang the harsh wild cries of soaring moorland birds.

And once, he reflected, when first he came to live at Colerreddy, he had hated the moor with all his heart and soul. In those days he had craved for London and for the old feverish, restless life of gambling and dancing and flirting and hiding, like a naughty child, from the duns collected at his door.

He remembered with amusement their first week at Monk's Tor, the ghostly dampness of the long-neglected house, the whistling wind, the creaking boards, the tears and recriminations of Harriet, the dreary sobbing of his tired children, the ill-cooked food hastily prepared by an overwrought and hostile Prudence. He had wished, he remembered, to destroy himself, but always he had lacked the courage. And, then, stealing guiltily down to the Magpie, he had found there men whom at first, in his London snobbishness, he had affected to despise because they were dirty and independent, and not easily to be impressed, but whom, when he learned to know them better, he had come to like and trust, because they were strong, honest and afraid of no one, and because they seemed to have their sturdy roots in the very moor itself.

He thought, too, of that one night of carousal with the gypsies, of the dark, cunning faces grinning at his table, of the sullen woman who had given birth to a child in his

leaking stable, of Camila's wild sister, who had danced like one possessed by devils, and of the vivid, savage, colourful *flamenco* music that had beat so madly, for so many years, in his secret heart, and that had, perhaps, revealed to him Camila herself as a young enchantress, whose spells no man might resist.

He had wandered to the window and stood gazing out upon the wasteland outside, all forgetful of Harriet, until her thin, petulant voice suddenly disturbed his musing.

"If you had not been such a fool and knave," she told him acidly, "we might still be living in London and our son married to a great heiress instead of a bastard tramp from the moor."

"Oh, London, London! Can you never forget our life there?"

She said, her mouth trembling like a child's:

"I want to have my carriage and drive once more about St. James's."

He consoled her hastily:

"Who knows? Perhaps one day, when Harry marries an heiress, we shall return."

She had one of her brief flashes of clear vision. For a moment it was as though a wizard had waved his wand and she was once more the young Harriet, sane, brave and ambitious.

"Never," she said, shaking her head, while her eyes grew dark and mournful. "We shall never go back, for very shame, if not for want of money. Why, Richard, all my looks are gone, and I am but a fright, having rotted these twenty years in the damp. How can a woman keep her pride out on the moor? You know that now I must drink, or go mad. A charming London hostess! I think my receptions would not be overcrowded."

He looked full at her for the first time for some weeks and once more felt pity. She still wore the ridiculous finery of Georgian days, and beneath a jewelled turban her face was white and drawn, scored with hard and bitter lines.

She was nervous, irritable, fidgety ; her hollow eyes blazed, her thin lips twitched. She was like a ravaged sorceress, all bedizened with plumes and ribands. Even her hands, that once had been so long and lovely, were now emaciated, like claws, and her nails were not overclean.

"Poor Harriet," he said awkwardly. "We are neither of us as young as we were."

"Your fault again ! I could have kept my looks, had I had anyone to show myself before."

"Don't be harsh to Evelyn and Camila," he pleaded ; "they are young, and much in love, and I think she is strong enough to make a man of him."

"Harsh to them ! I see them but once a year. And Harry—is he, too, to marry an Egyptian ? Have you sat plotting matrimony for him out in ditches on the moor ? "

"Indeed, no. Harry is old enough to look after himself."

"And tell me," she pursued, "since we are discussing family affairs, who, at the moment, is your own mistress ? "

"I have none."

"Oh, fie, Richard ! I cannot believe you to be speaking the truth."

"Yet it *is* the truth. I have done with such things. I am no longer young. I would be willing," he continued with a vague politeness, "to be friendly with you, if you would but let me."

She thought this speech meant more than it really did, and she tossed her head.

"Really, Mr. Lovell, you make yourself ridiculous ! How dare you propose to come to me fresh from your amours with servant-girls and tramp-women and low, filthy gypsies ? I may be a fright, but at least I preserve——"

He interrupted her angrily.

"I have never lain with gypsy women ! How often must I tell you that ? Have you completely lost your wits ? "

And so the old, bitter argument was once more pursued with violence on both sides, until, losing his temper as usual, he stumped indignantly from her room.

CHAPTER XXXVII

One gay and delicious spring morning, when the sky was more vivid than the cornflowers soon to grow wild in the fields and the bright air was sweet and fresh, and copper buds thrusting forth hilariously from the beech-branches seemed in such a hurry that they made themselves ridiculous, Camila was walking rapidly, yet with an almost furtive air, in the direction of the village.

She wished to escape from the watchful eyes that seemed always to be peeping from the windows of Colereddy. If Richard and Evelyn knew whither she was bound, they would laugh at her, and Harry would scoff, and Prudence disapprove. This was her secret, an innocent one, but she was desirous of guarding it. And to be alone after months of ardent companionship made her happy, for she had always been one who delighted in freedom.

When she reached the village, it seemed to be sleeping, so silent was it, so quiet and deserted, as it sunned itself, basking in the prospect of the warmth and loveliness that were to come before the dreary months of rain and mist crept in once more to batter it with wind and storm. The thatched cottages, like rows of great brown mushrooms, boasted clumps of gay, vivid, flaring flowers in their tiny gardens; the village green was fresh and dewy and verdant with rain that had fallen but two days since; the stocks, now empty, were wreathed with stinging-nettles; in the shallow green translucence of the village pond a flock of ducks, plump and pearly-white, swam aimlessly, and pecked vaguely at one another, too lazy for any real aggression.

In a cottage near the green a tumbled, red-faced woman

pegged the snowy night rails of her whole family upon a sagging line stretched from her door to an ancient apple-tree ; a bullfinch whistled shrilly in a cage, and below the cage a lean cat watched it with an eager, hungry patience. In the churned mud of the road two babies played, a limp rag doll propped up between them. Otherwise there was no sign of life ; only the sweet deserted indolence of a precocious May morning. The men were abroad in the fields driving sheep ; the woman secluded indoors cooking for their husbands. In the evening, when the swift dusk flew by like a bat from whose wings falls a dark greyness, candles would be lit and cottage windows would glow like yellow flowers along the road to welcome the men who would soon return, hungry, weary, sweating, and cheerful at the prospect of their supper and their women, and their brats playing like puppies, half-naked, on the doorsteps of their homes.

Camila, to whom the village was as familiar as her own pocket-handkerchief, thought not at all of the villagers, but only of her quest. She skirted the Magpie Inn, where, as she well knew, there was always some idler ready to cry out to his companions that Lovell's Egyptian wench was passing the tavern window, and slipped down a grass-grown lane, at the end of which stood a low dilapidated cottage, consisting of one room and an outhouse.

Here lived Mrs. Fell, Wise Woman and White Witch of the hamlet of Monk's Tor. Mrs. Fell and the Lovells had never met, owing partly to their own isolated aloofness and partly, perhaps, to the old woman's professional contempt for all amateurs. The stories that from time to time had reached Mrs. Fell of the carousings at Colereddy, the brazen witchwomen living up at the house, had, it must be admitted, annoyed her exceedingly more than once.

She could, she muttered to herself over her bread-and-cheese, have done all that they did, had she sold her soul to the Evil One, as (she was always careful to inform her *clientèle*) she had not. But it must be admitted that when she

heard of the Coleruddy witchwomen dancing naked among the cattle out on the moor to the strains of wicked music, she suffered more than one pang of envy. For she was timid and her spells were mild. Once, as a girl, she had seen a real witch burnt alive, and the anguished screams of that dark day had never ceased to ring in her ears.

It was true that people were more enlightened nowadays, but one could never be sure . . . she thought often of the New Year's drinking, and the harvest drinking, and the horse fair drinking. Men became wild then, when their stomachs were tight as drums with home-brewed ale, they were rough, and in a bullying mood. What a joke to duck the Wise Woman in the village pond ! And so on such nights she barred her door and sat hunched up timorously over her bare hearth, with only her cat, Tibby, to keep her company, and though she was scared to death herself, those outside imagined her to be hatching dark and wicked spells.

When she heard Camila's knock on the door, she was dozing, but she immediately assumed a brisk and professional manner, for no doubt some village maiden had stolen round to ask her advice about some amorous trouble. When she saw Camila on her threshold, slim and straight in her tartan dress of red and green, her silken black hair plaited across her head, her dark eyes vivid with excitement, she sat bolt upright in her chair to examine the visitor with an eager, passionate interest.

Camila, expecting a faery-tale witch, huddled gnome-like about her cauldron, found that her first impression was one of extreme disappointment. This squat old woman, in her brown shawl, with her round, red face, her straggling grey hair and her bright blue eyes, like gentians, was too ordinary for her taste, too much like the other village women gossiping outside their doors of a summer evening. Nevertheless, she was the Wise Woman of Monk's Tor, and had a reputation. Camila began timidly :

" Good morning, Mrs. Fell. I have come to ask your advice on a private matter."

The old lady, legs straddled wide apart, leaned forward to stare at her more keenly.

"My advice, eh? Ain't you one of the witchwomen of Colereddy? Can you not fashion your own spells without the aid of a poor old harmless Wise Woman like meself?"

"I come from Colereddy, but I'm no witch. Nor are there any witches in the house. Those are old tales, told of winter evenings at the Magpie."

"Yet you'm the one they calls the Egyptian?"

"Does that make me a witch?"

"Maybe, maybe. How should I know? What is it you'm wanting—has Lovell put you with child?"

"No, indeed he hasn't," Camila told her indignantly, "nor am I his woman, but the wife of his son."

Mrs. Fell repeated stubbornly:

"They say down here as you was Lovell's 'ooman first."

"Then they should be flogged for lying. I never was."

The witch, unable any longer to control her curiosity, demanded suddenly:

"Is it lies, then, that you dances up on the moor mother-naked, and that once you ran off in fire an' brimstone with—with Satan hisself?"

Camila replied, with a strange feeling of regret, that these tales, too, were false.

The Wise Woman drew a deep breath, perhaps a sigh of relief at finding herself the only sorceress of Monk's Tor. She asked again:

"What is it, then, you'm wanting from a poor simple old lady like meself?"

Before answering, Camila glanced about at the one small bare room of the cottage, at the rough hearth, empty now, at the patchwork rug before it, on which lay curled the fat tabby cat, at the low rafters, dusky with smoke, from which dangled half-cured hams and clusters of onions, like giants' grapes, at the untidy truckle-bed, with its one blanket, at the pots and saucepans piled anyhow about the room. She said at length, in a hesitating voice:

"It's true, isn't it, that you give advice on matters—matters of love?"

"Ay, on matters of love, an' matters of hate, an' drawing of teeth an' herbs and simples, too, for the curing of pain, an' if I wished, I could also make the cattle sicken, but them be tricky spells, and I'd as lief not meddle with them."

"I don't want you to sicken cattle."

"Is it, then," enquired Mrs. Fell craftily, "a love potion for one of the men up at Colereddy?"

"No. I am married, I tell you, and I have the love of my husband. It's something different. I want," she pursued rather uncomfortably, "I want to have a child, and so far, although we have been married four months, there is no sign of that."

The witch brooded for a moment, her red face propped on a square, freckled hand. Finally, she demanded:

"Which of the lads be it you'm wife to? Him as is black-browed an' big of shoulder or the other, the little^l lad with the yellow locks an' the small hands, no bigger than your own?"

Camila felt an indefinable melancholy at this unmistakable description of Evelyn. She answered, after a pause:

"The younger one, with the—the yellow hair. He is my husband."

"For breedin', had I been a maid," Mrs. Fell told her, "'tis t'other I'd have set my cap at."

"You don't understand," Camila informed her quickly. "I am very fond of my husband and I want to have a child. Can you help me?"

Mrs. Fell chuckled.

"Ay, maybe. But 'tis mostly for the other reason that young maids come up to the Wise Woman, secret, of a dark evening, with none to spy on 'em."

"Will you please give me some charm that will make me have a child?"

"I could give you a word of advice that'd make you

flare up, being young an' hot of temper. An' I could give you a charm, but first you must tell the poor Wise Woman more than you have."

"Very well. What do you want to know?"

The witch then proceeded to delve, with much bawdy chuckling, into the innermost secrets of Camila's married life. At first she was funny, but very soon became tedious and at length received only sulky monosyllables in reply to her questions. Finally, with much smirking, she sold the bride, for the sum of two shillings, a charm carved from a peachstone, which, after one embarrassed glance, was swiftly replaced in its tiny leather bag.

"Put that," wheezed Mrs. Fell, now husky from much senile laughter, "beneath the pillow of him you'm wife to, without he knows, and wish for your mommet every new moon."

"I will, and thank you. Please don't mention this to anyone."

"Wise Women never talks, or there'd be a ducking for 'em every seven days. Rest safe, my pretty, and don't forget me if your teeth are aching, or your stomach, or if you've a secret enemy for me to spite."

"I won't forget you."

Her hand was on the latch, when Mrs. Fell once more called her back.

"Here's a word thrown in for nothing, since you'm a fine handsome piece and no witchwoman, for all I've heard tell you were—them as is black, like you, spells danger. Danger and joy. The one goes with t'other. Don't you forget."

"Thank you," said Camila gravely, and passed from the gloom out into the sunshine.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

She had left the village and was halfway across a pack-horse trail that wound about the Tor before she had ceased to speculate upon her visit to the White Witch. In her pocket, wrapped in a handkerchief, lay the amulet that was to bring her the child that she had so greatly desired during the past months, being anxious to possess something of her own upon which to lavish the unsatisfied love that was so obviously not for Evelyn.

She had, indeed, tried to love him with all her heart, but she had failed. All she had for him was a curious tender feeling that made her anxious for his health, and worried when he coughed or refused his meals, or when he came back from the farm on a wet day and would not change his boots.

Sometimes, when she watched him reading over the fire or sleeping beside her on her pillow, she was still affected, although only for a few moments, by his extraordinary beauty, by the Saxon fairness of his silken hair, the lashes that curled in dark fringes upon his cheek, his delicate clear-cut features, the girlish, easily flushing skin that had always reminded her of the wild roses that clustered in verdant summer hedges. At such times she would remember how, in the innocent days of childish hero-worship, she had always imagined him to be the King of Elfland, cast for the few brief moments of a faery century into human flesh and blood. At such times she would be captivated for a moment, and, laying her head near his, would whisper in his ear endearing names ; then, as he woke, all that was elfin in him vanished, and she saw him once more, clearly and critically, as an ordinary mortal.

He would complain to her fretfully, petulantly, of a dozen trifles that caused him unspeakable irritation. She had been noisy and awakened him ; Prudence had brought him no water ; he was tired and didn't want to work ; she was a selfish wife, thinking only of her own comforts, and he would be better dead. At first she had argued with him, so that they began each morning with a quarrel ; later, as she learned wisdom, she never answered him and even learned to think of other things even while he was rebuking her. Indeed, she soon began to prefer his fretful moods to his more amorous moments, for although he was coolly sensual, he was never passionate, and it was at such times that his strange, almost morbid jealousy of the gypsy, Brazil, sprang from him like a darting flame to set fire to the anger that this name awoke in both their hearts.

Once she said to him :

" I want a child," and he had looked at her curiously, vaguely, as though she were a stranger. He at length asked her why.

She answered curtly :

" It's a natural desire, isn't it ? It would delight me and give me something to do. I wish—I'm so sorry I am not going to have one yet."

He gave a little shiver and told her, averting his eyes :

" It would make me feel old to be a father. At my age the idea's ridiculous."

" I'm younger than you and yet I want one."

" Oh, you ! You're talking nonsense. We have only been married four months. Sooner or later you'll get your wish. There's no hurry."

" But there is," she persisted. " It's just because we are so young that I want a baby. And it worries me sometimes, because I think that perhaps I can never have one."

" Oh, do stop talking about it !" and he muttered something beneath his breath that she guessed, since she caught the words " gypsy brat," to be the reverse of agreeable.

Therefore she had kept her visit to the Wise Woman secret from Coleruddy, and it was disconcerting, as she walked back towards the house, to hear behind her the beat of hooves upon the turf. She had no need to turn ; she knew that it was Harry, who often, when he had a free hour or so, visited Mr. O'Shea for a gossip and a glass of ale.

As he approached, he reined up his pony.

"Don't wait for me," she told him hastily.

He made no reply, but slid from his saddle and joined her.

"You're damned uncivil this morning," he remarked, after they had walked several yards in silence.

"I tell you I want to be alone."

"Then you're not in luck, for I don't share your feeling for solitude."

After another pause, he asked her sardonically whether Evelyn was angry with her and had turned her out of the house.

"You would be immeasurably disappointed, wouldn't you," she enquired scornfully, "if our marriage proved to be a happy one?"

"Disappointed, no, for it doesn't interest me as much as that. But I would be surprised."

"Why? How detestable you are! Why should we not be happy?"

"Because Evelyn wants a nanny, not a wife."

"I forbid you to make fun of Evelyn."

"Evelyn being my brother, I consider myself free to talk of him as I please."

She said no more, but turned her face away and would not speak to him. Leading his pony, he walked a little in front of her, and she was forced to observe, as she did with some annoyance, his air of complete self-confidence, the bravado of his striding walk. He wore rough clothes, his black hair wanted cutting, the very way he bore his head had in it something that was aggressive, almost insolent. He looked a rascal, and he was utterly indifferent. For a moment he reminded her of Brazil, the gypsy, but he was stronger,

more heavily built, and his shoulders were broader. But he walked with the same arrogance. She remembered very vividly, as she followed a few steps behind, the long tramps she had been forced to take during her period of enslavement to the gypsy, and how she had been dragged after him in lashing rain and blinding sleet,—had struggled on, heedless of sun and wind and snow.

Because such memories made her shudder, she forgot her irritation with Harry and called him back to her side. He turned and waited in silence for her to catch him up, his eyes fixed, not on her, but on the distant moorland ; as he waited, he pushed the dark locks of hair away from his forehead and wiped his face, which was burnt brown as a nut, with a ragged handkerchief, produced from his pocket. Even on such a fine day she noticed that his rough leggings were caked with mud

"Harry," she said, deliberately cajoling, "why must we always quarrel? I am ready to call a truce, if you will."

"Agreed," he answered, but still he looked far away, somewhere out across the wild paths leading towards Drizzle Combe.

"We shall be late," she said, and they resumed their way towards Colerreddy.

"What were you doing in the village?" he enquired suddenly.

"I?" She hesitated with at least three excellent lies on her lips, and then to her immense astonishment found herself telling him the truth, that she had sworn to keep from every man. "I was visiting the Wise Woman, Mrs. Fell."

"The Witch? I'll bargain you were pestering the old whore for a love-potion, the better to keep you and Evelyn in love with one another."

"No, indeed I wasn't. And there is no need to speak so bitterly, even if that were my errand, which is none of your concern."

"Tell me, Camila. I'm silent as the tomb and closer than the grave. What did you seek at Mrs. Fell's?"

She answered slowly and with an even greater amazement at her own incomprehensible indiscretion :

" I went to ask for some charm or spell that would give me a child."

" A child ? A brat of Evelyn's ? "

He threw back his head and laughed immoderately, so that the sound of his mirth was seized by an echo dwelling in the valley and swiftly sent back to them, a faint, wild sound of ghostly merriment.

" Oh, don't laugh at me ! " she told him, stamping her foot. " I'll not be laughed at by any great muddy farm-boy, least of all by you, who sneer at everything and everyone less sullen and less brutal than yourself."

He stared at her for a moment and then laughed once more and seized her in his arms, covering her face with light and mocking kisses. For a moment, astonished, she lay passive in his embrace, wondering if the world had come to an end ; then, as she began to struggle, he caught her shoulders and thrusting his mouth close to hers, kissed her once more, as she had not been kissed since the days of Brazil, the gypsy. Then, still laughing, he pushed her away from him.

" Now," he said coolly, " the pony's half-a-mile away and I must chase him before I get my dinner. Come with me, Camila."

She shook her head but would not scold or even look in his direction—indeed, she turned her back upon him.

" Oh, come," he said impatiently, " may I not embrace my sister-in-law, if so I please ? You're a gypsy, and pretty—why in God's name play the prude ? Haven't I told you that I'm more silent than the tomb ? You've nothing to fear from me."

But she turned and walked away towards Colereddy, expecting every moment to hear him running after her and to feel his great hands upon her shoulder. But in this she was mistaken, for he wheeled round scowling, his hands in his pockets, and went forth to catch his pony without another word.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Camila arrived at Colerreddy late, untidy, with a red flame of anger glowing on her cheeks. She sat down at the table in silence and wondered why she, who had suffered so much humiliation, should be in a rage because her ill-mannered foster-brother had chosen to kiss her. At length, paying no attention either to Richard or Evelyn, who were arguing about crops, she tried to be honest with herself and, partially succeeding, came to the strange conclusion that she was not so much angry as excited, agitated, and curious. Yes—she was actually curious about Harry and secretly wanted to know more about him.

She helped herself to food and tried to visualise him as she had seen him last, sturdy, slow-moving, with his dark, sun-tanned face, his blunt nose and brooding, rather sulky-lidded eyes, his crop of thick-growing, crow-black hair. She remembered that when he had laughed at her, mocking, his teeth had gleamed whiter than a row of almonds. She remembered, too, the hunched, indifferent look of his shoulders as he had turned to leave her in search of his pony. He had obviously kissed her to annoy her, caught for a moment in the mood for some rough and boorish prank. Had he, she wondered, some woman in the village, some coarse, placid slattern like Jennifer Crowland, who would treat his temper with unruffled equanimity and his amorous moods with a large, good-natured acquiescence?

It was strange, too, she reflected, that at times he should remind her of the gypsy. The same dark, slanting, cunning eyes, the same broad cheek-bones, the same grim determination to get what he wanted. Yet he was not what the trampers would call “a flash cove,” as Brazil had been; he had neither the slim waist nor the paste rings nor the golden eardrops; rather was he a creature from the soil

and of the soil ; a man rooted deep in the moorland or hewn, perhaps, from the trunk of some mighty and enduring tree. He was moody rather than vindictive ; yet she thought that she pitied his woman almost as much as Brazil's, since both were violent and tempestuous men, who demanded everything and gave back nothing in return.

"Camila," Evelyn repeated imperiously.

"What is it ?"

"Listen when I talk to you. I have here a letter from Madam Celia in Bath, that she wrote Papa. Read it, and see if you find it amusing ?"

She picked up the sheet of paper which he handed her.

"DEAR PAPA,

"I write to inform you that I was four days ago delivered of a Daughter. The Infant is prettily formed, amiable of disposition, and in excellent health. The Surgeon also reports my own condition as Satisfactory. Lance and I have determined to call our Daughter Caroline, having a *fondness* for the name, and Amelia, after my Mother-in-law, Mrs. Neville.

"Prudence informed me not long ago that Evelyn has been for some months wedded to Camila. Neither Lance nor I would wish to interfere in family matters, but at the same time we cannot help feeling that this marriage was a most Imprudent Step in view of Camila's unknown and *mysterious* Antecedents. I only pray that *real good* will come of it, and that, forgetting her Wildness, she may find matrimony as inspiring and helpful and in every way Delectable as I do myself.

"It only remains, dear Papa, for Lance and me to send our Dutiful Respects both to you and to Mama, and I must not forget that Baby is anxious to send kisses to both her Grandparents.

"In conclusion, Papa, I remain,

"Your Respectful and Affectionate Daughter,

"CELIA NEVILLE."

Camila read this effusion with increasing fury, while Richard watched her sardonically and Evelyn with an impish mirth. Finally, crumpling it in her hand, she exclaimed indignantly :

"What the devil does she mean by interfering in my business? What has she to do with either Evelyn or myself? How have I ever harmed her, or her husband either?"

"You perceive, Papa," cried Evelyn, delightedly to Richard, "that I am all my life tied to a pepper-box?"

"My letter," demanded Richard, unmoved, and she gave it back to him.

"A veritable shrew," Evelyn continued, "one who should at once be bitted in a scold's bridle!"

"All women," declared Richard, eating bread and cheese, "should after the age of sixteen be bitted in scolds' bridles. By the way," he observed to Camila, "if you ran less on the moor and attended more punctiliously to your duties in the kitchen, my digestion might, I think, suffer less acutely than it does."

"Then," she said, "you must make your peace with Prudence, who treats me as a baby and will not suffer me near her, either in the kitchen or in the larder."

At this moment Harry came into the room and sat down in silence to his dinner. Evelyn handed him Celia's letter, but after one brief glance he returned it without comment. Camila watched him, her chin propped on her hand. He ate with gusto, as though he were hungry, and drank two tankards of ale, lowering his eyes, as though it did not please him to look at anyone, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He looked, she thought, not unlike his mother.

Richard, lighting his pipe and preparing to fall into the heavy, uncomfortable trance now the inevitable aftermath of every meal, was suddenly awakened by the voice of his eldest son.

"After to-morrow," Harry was saying calmly, "I intend to leave Coleruddy for the farm, where I shall live, as the tenant of our tenants."

"What folly are you talking now?"

"Not folly—sense. I have a mind to live independently, near to my work."

Richard commented :

"If anyone goes to live on the farm, it should be these turtle-doves here. This house, as you well know, will be yours after my death."

"I am more enamoured of the farm than of the house—at the moment."

"Suit yourself," Richard told him laconically and added, after a pause : "An affair of the heart, I suppose?"

"No. I tell you I have a mind to live by myself."

"How we shall miss your delightful geniality when you have left us!" Evelyn observed impudently.

Harry made no reply, but smiled, cracking a walnut, which he did by putting a finger upon it and crashing his fist upon the finger. The table jolted, and Camila jumped to her feet.

Evelyn immediately demanded :

"Where are you going, Camila?"

"I don't know. To the drawing-room."

"Then wait for me."

"Really," she exclaimed, exasperated, "are you a baby that I must lead you by the hand wherever I go?"

Harry smiled once more, openly, derisively, as though he thought them both highly absurd. While Evelyn began to argue with him, she slipped away into the drawing-room.

Here, to her surprise, she found Harriet seated near the window, with tatting on her knee and her parrot croaking on the arm of her chair.

"Good afternoon," said Camila, and went to sit in the other window-seat with a book.

"It would have been more courteous," Harriet remarked, "to knock at the door."

"Yes, had I been entering your bedroom."

"This happens to be my drawing-room," Harriet reminded her with glacial civility.

"Mine also, since I married your son."

Here the parrot yelled with all the force of its lungs :

"Brute ! Robber ! Cheat ! Knave !"

"You frighten my bird," complained Harriet fretfully.

"I'm sorry, then. But he seems angry rather than frightened."

"Angry ? Yes, perhaps he is angry. Perhaps he is nice in his company and likes only to consort with women that are genteel, not with those that have run wild in hedge-rows."

"Then I am sorry for him, since he has missed so much that is agreeable."

Here Evelyn put his head round the door and, seeing his mother, made a face, at once disappearing with the celerity of a jack-in-the-box.

Camila got up to follow him, but was immediately called back.

CHAPTER XL

“ I want,” said Harriet, “ to ask you a question.”

Dropping her needlework, she leaned forward to fix the younger woman with those smouldering and restless eyes that were, Camila thought, like deep set, sombre jewels, like the eyes of a snake.

“ A question ? ” Camila repeated uncomfortably. In the quiet mellow room, where the gentle gloom was broken here and there by dancing, dappled blots of sunshine, it seemed as though once more, perhaps for the hundredth time, darkness stirred between these two women, who had both, at one time or other, been accused of spells and witchcraft.

“ One question,” Harriet continued relentlessly. “ Why did you marry my son ? ”

“ I find your question very easy to answer. Because I love him.”

“ That’s not true. You fancied yourself in love with him before you ran off like a wanton with your gypsy lovers. Then, when you came back, having learned the ways of men, you were indifferent to him. Yet you married him. I have no great love for Evelyn, but your Egyptian tricks repay watching. Why Evelyn ? ”

“ I’ll not discuss this with you. It is a secret between Evelyn and myself.”

Harriet continued, in a soft and pitiless tone of voice :

“ Now, I’ll tell you who it is you love. Because I live upstairs, and am sick and ailing, and feel the cold of winter eat into my bones, all of you in this house look upon me as a poor ghost, that has long since ceased to haunt you. Yet when I bide in my room, I still know much of what goes on below.”

"Prudence, telling tales!"

Harriet continued, ignoring the interruption:

"I know your lover, and he is not Evelyn. Evelyn could never hold you, you who are accustomed to go with robber men. But you are in love, and you are in love with my other son, Harry. You love Harry."

This name, pronounced aloud with so cool a nonchalance, smote with a crash louder than gunfire into the tranquillity of the dusky, wistful room. Camila protested, unconsciously putting her hands before her ears.

"That isn't true, and you know it. Never, never, has there been anything between Harry and myself. We have always been bad friends—why, when we were children——"

Harriet interrupted, her voice like flakes of snow:

"I always knew you to be the devil's child. When you were but a babe, Mr. Lovell already desired you. Like all Egyptians, you are a weaver of spells. Once I hated you, but for many years now I have been indifferent. When you married Evelyn, I flung myself into a passion, but that was to fright both Prue and Mr. Lovell, for in my heart, which has for so long been numb, I cared not at all. Nor do I care if you deceive Evelyn with Harry. I have neither love nor hatred for the whole pack of you, but am like a woman at the play, that watches, quite apart, behind her fan, some foolish masquerade of love."

Camila repeated with the obstinacy of desperation:

"I don't love Harry. You must be mad to say that. I love Evelyn."

Harriet smiled, showing her white gums, and stroked the parrot's head.

"How diverting to confuse a sorceress!"

"That word is strange on your lips. Down in the village they say that you yourself have made a pact with Satan."

"Enchanting," Harriet told her languidly, "were the gossip only true. I would most ardently welcome Satan, since he, coming from hell, might warm that within me that has for so long been frozen."

And she laughed again, with an odd, sham, tinkling sound, for she was play-acting and enjoying herself.

But Camila continued, too much angered to pay attention to this last speech :

“Nor have you any right to say that I ran off with gypsy lovers. I had but one, and him I hated. I fled from him. There was no love between us.”

“And there is love between you and Evelyn ! Well, I wish you joy of it. He has all his life been ailing, or has fancied himself so, and indeed before he was born I went each night to balls and parties and danced and flirted, and was gay, never returning to Tilney Street before the first light of dawn.”

And as always, when she talked of the old London days, her eyes grew vacant as she stared before her at the mirage of some majestic ballroom of the past, all bright and radiant with tall hosts of waxen candles and with the lights that poured in brilliant gems from chandeliers like crystal waterfalls ; as she heard the faint and roguish music, long forgotten, yet swelling forth once more to animate the gorgeous throngs moving to and fro ; as she surrendered herself to this vision which, even after many years, was still so vivid and triumphant, for one brief fleeting moment her cold and weary heart was warmed and grateful and at peace.

While she brooded, heedless of the parrot's screams, Camila opened the window and slid down into the garden below. Knee-deep in the wild grass, she walked until she came upon the sullen shade of the great cedar-tree, in the boughs of which, as children, they had so often played.

And here it was that she was found by Harry, who had been skulking about the house since dinner trying to capture a moment alone with her—why he knew not, for he was certainly in no mood for philandering. His soft footfall made her start, although she thought it was her husband who had come to find her.

She asked him sharply, for Harriet had disturbed her more than she would admit :

"What is it? What do you want? Where's Evelyn?"

"I neither know nor care," he said, and leaned against the trunk of the cedar-tree, his eyes fixed upon the grass beneath his feet.

"Oh, Harry, what has been the matter with you all day?"

He looked at her and answered, after a pause :

"Did you hear what I said to-day at dinner about going to live at the farm?"

"Of course I heard."

"Good. You know you may come with me if you wish?"

"Really...! Sometimes I think you should be in Bedlam. Why, in heaven's name, should I wish to come with you?"

"Oh, for many reasons. Because I think that we'd be happy—happier, anyhow, than you are down here. And I'd like your company of a night over the fire. And you said this morning how much you wanted a child—Evelyn will never give you one."

"Are you seriously proposing that I should go openly to the farm and live there with you as your unlawful wife?"

He nodded, with a peculiar expression. This, after much cogitation, was actually what he really intended, and he was still astonished at himself.

She demanded, after some reflection :

"But why, Harry? You don't even love me?"

He answered impetuously, ceasing to lounge against the cedar-tree :

"That's where you're wrong, for all your gypsy wiles. I *do* love you. You've known it for some time, certainly since this morning. I've been wanting you for myself a long time—since first you returned from the Egyptians. Unfortunately, you had eyes for none but Evelyn."

As he came closer, she sprang back, fearful of being observed from some shuttered window of the house.

"Camila," he said, "I know that I could make you happier than Evelyn ever has. Up there, alone, we should learn to know each other—there would be none to disturb us. I'm not sweet-tempered and I realise it, but I'd see you

came to no harm. You'd be safe with me. You would never again be stolen away—never. I'd keep too close a watch."

"But if you loved me when I came back, why did you dislike me so much before I went away? Did I change so much during those twelve months?"

"Yes, to my mind."

"But how?"

"You came back," he told her, pulling twigs from the cedar-branches above his head, "with a taste of wildness, a certain mighty odd wildness that you should always have had. Before, they'd tamed you, or rather Evelyn had tamed you, since you were his slave. It didn't suit you, or me, either, to watch you being enchanted by that creature, for you know as well as I do that he has no heart. But when you came back, you were a gypsy, as you should be, and you were splendid. Even when you married Evelyn and carried snowdrops up the church, you were still splendid, for you seemed wilder still, with those pale flowers about you. And I wanted you more than ever."

"But why wait until I married Evelyn? Had you no tongue in your head?"

"You know very well that had I told you then, you would have laughed at me. You were so prideful, Camila, thinking that you could live happily with him. And I knew that, given rope, you'd hang yourself. And so you've been granted over four months in which to do so."

"But," she told him coldly, "I haven't hanged myself yet, nor him, nor you, in spite of what you call my gypsy wiles. Everything is just the same."

And she looked away from him towards the sky, which now was overcast; for a dark-edged cloud swept truculently across the sun, and the long grass shivered, and a rabbit, feeding near the furze-bushes beyond the firs, sat for a moment bolt upright, then fled, as though disturbed by that faint shudder that passes sometimes over the earth when the sun is suddenly obscured.

"I must go in," she said to Harry.

CHAPTER XLI

"Wait one minute," he said, and caught her wrist. "Before you go, you must tell me that you'd like to come to the farm—that you're faithful to Evelyn only from duty and respect and pride, and all those feelings that appear so strange in such a woman as yourself. Please, Camila! Come, now—admit you were happy at being kissed this morning!"

"Yes," she said, "I was. We both know that. I think that I must want to come, Harry. And yet, being as I am, full of pity for Evelyn, I should miss him sorely. So what can I say?"

"You can say what you have never said—that you love me, and that you'll be sorry when I'm gone."

"Love you? But I'm not sure that I do. I think, perhaps, I should like you as my lover, and I think it mad of me to tell you so. And I'm not sure if we would agree—in fact I know that we should fall out. And then, being rough, you might strike me, and then I'd swear at you, and a pretty pair we'd make, up there at the farm, with the wind roaring at our windows and the two of us glowering, like angry images, one at each side of our fire."

He laughed.

"That might possibly happen, for you're a strange wild woman, Camila, and when I'm tired, my temper's harsh. Yet you would be happier, I know, living up there with me than down here, with my father cursing at you and Evelyn begging you to smooth his hair before he sleeps. His hair! Good God! How can you touch those wretched yellow lovelocks? I'll swear he crimps them with my mother's curling-irons!"

"He does no such thing," she told him primly.

"You and Evelyn together ! What a ludicrous fantastic nightmare ! And you, of all women, with all your dark foreign airs and your gypsy boldness ! Listen, Camila, if you say ' no ' to me, I'll carry you by force, for have you I will, if not now, before the winter ! "

"You mustn't talk to me like that," she said, "if you want me to love you. To begin with, it makes me laugh, coming from you, who are always so glum, like an angry hedge-hog plucked from the ditch, with all its spines abristle. I had never thought you so ardent a wooer, Harry."

Then, for she saw he was hurt, having but little sense of humour, she continued, compassionate :

"And Harry . . . please leave me now and don't tempt me any more. For you do tempt me. And I think I might so easily love you."

"Then why not come ? "

"You know. Because of Evelyn. I won't leave Evelyn yet—not until he has been unkind. If he is ever unkind, I'll come. One night, perhaps, you'll hear me tapping at your windows, and then you'll take me in, all bedraggled from the wind and dripping with the rain. But until then, I won't see you. I can't, for I think that you might find it too easy to bewitch me. So we'll say good-bye, and meet once more, demurely, at supper-time."

"You won't see me again. I'll be off before supper."

"Then good-bye, Harry."

And she ran away swiftly, without another word, for there were tears upon her face, and she wanted only to stay with him, in the dusk of the cedar-tree, and to hear him tell her that he loved her for her wildness that was akin to his own. It was for this that she refused his love, and also, perhaps, because he beckoned her away from that safety that once—how long ago !—had seemed so much to be prized.

CHAPTER XLII

Returning to the house, she was pleased to learn that Evelyn had ridden off to the farm an hour before. Avoiding the drawing-room, she went to the kitchen, made herself a cup of tea, and took it upstairs to her bedroom, where she immediately forgot it.

This bedroom, extremely bare and plain save for an ornate carved oak four-poster bed that had been moved there since her marriage, somehow contrived always to have about it an air of faint and indefinable disorder. At one time a thin film of dust on the mantelpiece, at another stray garments, male and female, occasionally discoverable in odd corners of the room—behind the bed, under the arm-chair, or even in the fireplace. This untidiness was not Evelyn's fault but Camila's ; it was, indeed, a frequent subject of dispute between them. She tried with all her might to achieve order, but somehow her efforts never seemed to endure after the daily business of making the bed and dusting the room in a somewhat abstracted manner. Occasionally she brought up flowers, and then, if Evelyn was in a good temper, he praised her for her thoughtfulness, although actually she gathered them as much for herself as for him. Yet, when the mice leaped at night behind their wainscots and Camila was practical enough to bait a trap, it was Evelyn who objected, and threw it out of the window. This fastidiousness in one whose business it was to provide lambs and calves for slaughter had at first seemed to her quite extraordinary. Now, however, she was more or less accustomed to his vagaries.

She shut the door behind her, wishing that she dared to lock it, and, pausing only to retrieve a nightgown dangling

from the armchair, went straight to her mirror, a flimsy, trifling affair, small and oval-shaped, fantastically wreathed with pink and mauve sea-shells. It seemed to her impossible, utterly and completely out of the question, that she should not find written upon her face the story of this new, strange secret, this sudden, furious, half-sullen aching need for Harry. Yet, when she gazed intently in the glass, there was nothing to brand her in Evelyn's eyes, only a flame of colour in her cheeks that soon, in the closeness of the room, would fade, leaving her, she felt, pale and frozen, like Harriet, a woman whose heart had for ever petrified.

The deepest emotion of her life, she brooded, pushing the mirror away from her, was bound up with this resolute refusal to weave her life with Harry's. Emotion—it was more than emotion—it was sacrifice; sacrifice more poignant,—she was sure,—more appalling, more sickening in its sense of perpetual twilit despair, than any sacrifice ever before made by any woman for any man. Sitting on the floor by her mirror, she experienced a physical torment that seemed to wrench her very vitals in twain and sent sweat streaking her face; it was as though she experienced the very pangs of childbirth for the sake of this man with whom she had never lived, and who had entered and been cast from her life in one short afternoon.

Yet, fundamentally honest as she was, she was forced to admit that since her return to Coleruddy Harry had cast over her a spell of which she had at first been scarcely conscious; she had fled from the gypsy, seeking protection; she had found it with Evelyn; she had been too preoccupied in winding herself, like a cocoon, in the skeins of safety, to realise that the gypsy, for all his cruelty, had taught her something of the ways of men; that although he had repelled her, there was at the same time something within her, something savage and blazing and uncontrollable, that cried out for what he could give her, and for what she could not find in Evelyn. And so she had turned, almost without knowing it, to Harry, and Harry had

responded, relishing in her that very lawlessness that most irritated his brother.

Remembering the innocent and sentimental passion that once she had cherished for Evelyn, she began almost to imagine that she must at that time have been witch-ridden to have been so blind. Harry, too, must have been witch-ridden ; how else, brought up together as they were, could they have failed so completely to visualise a life shared magnificently up at Pinetree, a life by turns sombre, sullen, and madly gay, shared by two lonely people, natural only when they were together, indifferent to the fierce moor roaring at their shrouded windows, indifferent also to the grumblings and naggings of those who dragged their lives away behind the walls of damp Coleruddy ?

As she brooded, still sitting on the floor, with the dusk swimming listlessly, like cobweb clouds, about the bare impersonal room, the door opened suddenly, and Evelyn, her husband, came in so quietly that he made her start.

For a moment they peered uncertainly at one another, the girl's face tawny dark in the twilight, the boy's unearthly pale, his head a cloud of silver against the greyness of the open window. She was eighteen, he a year older ; already, as though predestined to suffer, these children were being thrust coldly, mercilessly, irresistibly, into the dark writhing problems of an adult life for which they were both ill prepared, obeying as they did no law but that of their own capricious emotions. He was tired, she imagined herself broken-hearted.

Yet, being the more adroit, she was the first to smile and bid him good evening. He sat down beside her on the floor.

"Where have you been since dinner ?"

"On the moor, for some fresh air."

"Yet you knew I wanted you. How cruel you are, Camila !"

She replied, still feeling stiff and dazed, still fearful that her secret must be written upon her brow for him to see :

"I went after dinner to the drawing-room, where I found Madam your mother in grand array. She was talkative, and wouldn't let me leave. After so much reminiscence I was stifled."

He stared at her attentively with his light, black-rimmed eyes :

"Next market-day is Harry's turn—I shall stay here and see my wife, who has become a stranger."

"Oh, Evelyn, what a baby you are !"

And she found herself, pitiful yet indifferent, stroking the fair curls that Harry had been deriding only an hour or two ago. He yawned, and laid his head upon her breast. She continued to smooth his hair and thought at once, with a bitter longing, of Harry's voice as he had mocked his brother. For a time there was silence, and if she sighed, he was too tired to notice. Soon it was quite dark, but sitting now close-curved together, they were too abstracted to think of candles.

"I hate the farm," Evelyn suddenly remarked with vehemence.

She said nothing. She had no wish to discuss the farm with him.

Another pause. Suddenly he raised his head and demanded in a louder voice :

"Camila !"

"What is it ?"

"Tell me something more about that man—Brazil. Your gypsy sweetheart !"

"Brazil ?"

She repeated the name dreamily, with none of her usual evasion, for she was thinking of Harry, speaking to Harry. Evelyn was no longer in the room.

She continued, looking out of the window, stroking his head mechanically : "There is nothing more to tell. I hated him ; he despised me, for I had lived in houses. That for him was the unforgivable sin."

Instinctively conscious of her abstraction, he grew crafty.

Now, perhaps, he might learn more of this strange, sorrowful adventure that so much aroused his jealousy ; for never so long as he lived, would he forget that he had taken what the gypsy disdained—the leavings of Brazil !

He continued in a gentler tone :

“ He took you at once to Cornwall ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ How did you know where you were ? Those are foreign lands for you.”

“ I glimpsed the peak of Brown Willy and knew where we were bound.”

“ To what part of Cornwall did you go ? ”

“ Oh . . . all parts. The place where we stayed the longest is the one that I have forgotten, for at that time I was ailing. I can remember only the name.”

“ Where was it ? ”

“ Let me see. . . .” Still caressing his head, her eyes fixed, she frowned, striving to recapture this lost and forgotten epoch of her life.

“ Well ? ” he urged, as she remained silent.

“ Lyonesse. That was the name. Lyonesse.”

“ An island, then ? ”

“ An island ? No. We crossed no water.”

“ That’s nonsense,” he told her impatiently.

“ Why ? ”

“ That’s nonsense I tell you—rubbish from the faerytales. Lyonesse doesn’t exist—there’s no such place.”

“ You’re wrong. We—I stayed there for some time. I can’t remember how long. And I can remember nothing about it, for I fell ill. But sometimes I think that I was content there. Perhaps it was so pleasant that I forgot even the gypsies.”

And she stroked his hair no longer, forgetful even of Harry, while she tried with all her might to remember what had happened to her in the land that she called Lyonesse. Then, swiftly, everything was shattered. He pushed her aside and scrambled to his feet.

"Camila !"

She came back to life with a start of apprehension. When she had first entered the room, the sun had been shining ; now it was quite dark, and the skies were overcast ; there was only one star, and that so feeble that it seemed more like the spectre of a star that once had died.

"Camila !"

"What is it ? Don't shout at me, Evelyn."

He went to fetch the candle, lit it with trembling fingers, and thrust it close to her face. Dazed by this little circle of bright, quivering light she turned her eyes away. He shook her by the shoulder.

"Camila, do you realise what you have been telling me ?"

"Can you never leave me in peace ? I've only answered your questions."

"You've answered them to some purpose to-night. You tell me that this man, this monster, took you to some drowned faery-tale land and that there you were 'content' because it was all so 'pleasant' ! You *did* love him, then, Camila ! You *were* happy when you were with him ?"

"Brazil ?" she was perplexed. "I never said that I was happy with Brazil. You know the misery I suffered with him—I've told you a hundred times."

"Then what, in Heaven's name, are you talking about ?"

"About this time in Cornwall that you won't believe in. I *was* happy there ; I think Brazil had left me for some time. But I tell you I can't remember anything about it. I was ill afterwards—very ill."

Her voice had risen and when she sprang to her feet, he saw that she was very white. But he continued remorselessly,

"This is the first I've heard of any illness. What was the matter with you ?"

"Oh . . . I don't know . . . a fever. *You* would have died, if they'd treated you as they did me. Now, please——"

"Camila, will you stop all this concealment and tell me the truth ?"

And then, all at once, for the first time since their marriage, she flew into a rage, and dashed the candle from his hand, amazing him by her violence. Then, speaking so quietly that her lips scarcely moved, she said :

“ Evelyn, unless you leave me in peace about all this, I’ll run away now, to-night, for ever. Do you understand that ? Because if you no longer care for me, there is nothing to bind me to Coleruddy, nothing, nothing at all. And I can fend for myself, as you know full well. But now I’ve warned you. If you speak to me once more of those twelve months when I was with the gypsies, if ever again you show yourself jealous of this man I so utterly detest, you will never see me any more, for I’ll endure nothing further from you. And if you try to shut me up, I’ll jump from the window, so you’ll not keep me that way. Now do you understand ? ”

And as she spoke, she was thinking, with a joy that glowed warm in her heart, of Harry’s lighted window up there in the dark at Pinetree. Soon, very soon now, she would be with him for ever. She almost laughed to herself as she turned impulsively, half unconsciously, towards the closet where she kept her clothes. A moment passed while she waited for an outburst of fury that would send her straightway running, like a wild thing, to fling haphazard a few snatched personal belongings before she should leave him for ever.

But he was silent, and she was forced to turn and look towards where he stood, a vague, dark shape in the blacker shadows of the room.

“ Well ? ” she said impatiently, “ Have you finished with me ? Aren’t you going to ask me once again whether I loved Brazil ? ”

Still in silence, he moved towards her, while she shrank sullenly against the wall, suspicious, motionless.

He was close now, touching her, winding his arms about the coldness of her body. She remained still, striving to make herself more icily repellent than a marble statue ; yet he persisted, soft, insinuating, fondling her waist, her arms,

her breasts. The light in Harry's window, blazing clear in her mind, began suddenly to fade beneath these familiar and pitiful caresses with bewildering swiftness. Once, long ago, she had humbled herself in her vain attempt to thaw him from his elvish, snow-bound remoteness; now it was his turn to succeed where she had failed. Humble, wilful, cajoling in one, he brought her to her knees from pity and habit, loneliness and fatigue.

Soon his fair head lay once more upon her lap, and she, who had been at first disgusted because his eyes were wet and she had never seen men weep, now laid her cheek against his, and soothed him, and kissed his lips, and shut her eyes to the glow of Harry's fireside.


"Camila, you'll never leave me? Say so once again, that this time I may believe you."

"I'll not leave you, Evelyn, while you love me."

"And you forgive me, Camila?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes. Please don't let us talk of it any more."

And so Prudence found them, when she came trotting exasperated upstairs to discover why neither had appeared at supper.



CHAPTER XLIII

During the next few months Harry was seldom at Colerreddy, and whenever he came, Camila observed that one eye was closed, as though he had been fighting. Once a tooth had been knocked out, but, when questioned by Evelyn, he scowled and would not reply. Village news, however, travels swiftly ; Prudence soon came out with the information that he spent his free time fighting with the men at the Magpie Inn.

“ And he’s not one,” the old woman continued, sighing, “ who’ll steady as he grows older. It’s up with his fists to all who cross him nowadays, and a headstrong, wilful life he’s leading, and will go on leading, unless he settles down as Evelyn has done.”

Richard, to whom these remarks were addressed, received them with indifference.

As spring gave place to a damp and leaden summer, with long grey days and pattering rain, Richard seemed to have relapsed into a heavy, unwholesome apathy that increased as September drew near. He felt sluggish, lazy, drearily inert. Sometimes his stomach ached ; at other times it was as though his head would burst ; and after meals he nodded, so that no one could rouse him. He was too drowsy now to ride abroad, caring only to doze in his study, sitting in August before a blazing fire, with his curtains drawn to exclude the untimely venom of the elements outside.

Yet, as he dozed, he dreamed of the moorland that he had grown to love even when, as now, the solitary, moaning waste was scourged and lashed by the fury of wind and rain. He longed to brace himself for the effort of saddling his horse to ride forth and meet the whirl of rain that stung

his face, the roaring gale that whipped his ears poppy-red. Yet somewhere within him, concealed inside the great and complicated machine that was his body, some vital physical element, the instrument of all initiative, refused point-blank to function. Always during his life he had dominated his large and powerful frame. Now, in his turn, he was to be dominated. And so he lounged heavily in his armchair and swore and shivered, and flung fresh lumps of peat upon a leaping, cheerful fire.

On such an afternoon his son Evelyn entered the study and informed him, pleasantly enough, that he was tired to death of farming.

Richard stared, scowling. The boy seemed so gay and self-confident, with his bright hair and smiling face, his airy assumption that his preposterous news would be agreeable to his parent.

"Indeed?" Richard grunted. "May I ask, then, how you propose to keep yourself and your wife?"

"I've come here," Evelyn explained, "to tell you that. Look, Papa."

He was carrying a package which he now proceeded to unwrap, producing an object which he showed before his father's eyes. Richard peered at it and perceived that he was being asked to examine a painting. He bent forward.

"That's the wrong way up. You're looking at it upside down."

"Keep your hands away, damn you. I'm not an idiot."

Reversing the picture, he examined a composition evidently inspired by those moors for which he pined. Painted in water-colours, the sketch revealed a black and lowering sky, a slope of wind-tossed bracken, and, in the foreground, a vast, truculent, belligerent stag with its mouth wide open.

"Very pretty," Richard commented, "but what exactly has this to do——"

"But *listen*," Evelyn interrupted. "During the last few months I have painted several of these moorland studies.

I showed one or two to O'Shea, and he sent them to a friend of his, a dealer, who lives in London. This man reports that I have a pretty talent and wishes me to see him there in town, taking with me all my paintings. Now, Papa——"

"God damn the parson for interfering in my affairs ! I'll teach him to mind his own business ! And you—have you taken leave of your senses ? Let me hear no more talk of painting ! "

Evelyn smiled.

"I leave for London in three days' time. I shall stay there under a fortnight. If Harry grumbles at being left short, I'll work the harder when I return. But soon, perhaps very soon, I hope to support myself by this same painting that you think so foolish."

Richard was silent. He had striven with all his force to rouse himself to fury, and found that his blood was still too sluggish to permit of more than querulous and futile protest. He contented himself by remarking, in a quieter tone of voice :

"You're a ninny, and always have been, and spoon-fed into the bargain. We'll see what happens to you in London, you and your miserable paintings, and if you leave Harry short, you'll pay the wages of an extra hand while you're away. Then we'll see how much money you and Camila will be left with in London."

"Camila ? She's not coming with me."

"Indeed ? "

"No," Evelyn told him carelessly, wrapping up his picture. "She has no desire to go, and indeed the expense would be too great."

And whistling, he walked out of the room.

Richard, poking his fire, grumbled for some time to himself at Evelyn's imbecility ; soon, however, as the cheerful, crackling warmth penetrated to his marrows, he began to forget the silly boy with his preposterous daubs, and sank once more into the immobility of that heavy coma from which he had been aroused.

Evelyn found Camila in the drawing-room aimlessly straightening the portraits of long-dead Lovells that looked at her down their noses, she thought, for having dared to marry into the family, when she should most certainly have stayed on the other side of the windows, out there in the storm, with people of her own race. Really, as she studied them, they seemed to resent her presence in their drawing-room, and the only likeness near which she dallied was that of Great-Aunt Adelaide, painted in her youth by an unknown artist—alabaster white of shoulder, saucy and laughing and bold of face, with warm brown eyes and silver-powdered hair all twined with turquoise and pearl forget-me-nots.

"I shouldn't be afraid of her ghost," thought Camila, and wondered why this graceful, merry, seductive woman had never married.

Behind her, Evelyn called her name.

"Evelyn, why did Great-Aunt Adelaide never marry?"

This frivolous and, to him, quite pointless question, was sternly ignored.

"Camila, I leave for London the day after to-morrow."

"Really? Then did Richard—did your father approve of your plans?"

"Not he, since he only thinks of eating, drinking, sleeping—and farming. Nevertheless, he can't stop me. And when I have shown my paintings to this Mr. Abels, I shall know precisely where I stand."

"How long will you be away?"

"Not more than a fortnight."

"A fortnight? But you told me five days."

"Oh, Camila, for God's sake refrain from making any more difficulties! What are a few days, when it's a question of my whole future? I entreat you to be reasonable."

It was already dark, and she went to draw the curtains, much annoyed by his irritability. She pressed her face for a moment to the jet-black pane, all blurred with driving rain, then said over her shoulder:

"Evelyn, I wish you wouldn't leave me for so long."

"Damn you," he told her crossly, "I tell you I have to go. When I remember that *you* left me once for twelve long months, these wifely fears become you very ill."

"We were not married then, and in any case I have never heard the end of it."

"Well, don't plague me any more—I'm in no mood for teasing."

She went in silence to sit by the fire with her book. He fidgeted about the room until it occurred to him to ask her when she intended to pack for him.

"To-morrow."

"Yes, it *would* be to-morrow. Why must you always leave everything until the last minute? To-morrow I shall be at the farm, unable to help you—at the moment I'm at liberty, so come up now."

"I don't want your help, which is nothing but hindrance, and I'm not at liberty now—I'm reading."

"Then put down your book when I talk to you."

As she took no notice, he flung himself upon her and after a struggle succeeded in throwing the book into the fire.

"There!" he said, panting and rather shame-faced. "Now will you do as I bid you?"

She watched the white curling pages squirm and shrivel as the flames licked them and fed upon them, until there was nothing left but a pile of grey, flaky ashes. Then she coldly informed him that he might do his packing for himself, so far as she was concerned.

"And you may stay away," she added, "as long as you please. I'm tired to death of your tantrums and ill-temper. I've a mind to return to the gypsies."

Yet that night there was a reconciliation, and she spent the next day packing for him, with the result that she missed a visit from Harry, who came round in no sweet temper to grumble to his father about Evelyn's selfishness and idleness. Evelyn continued to defy the pair of them. On the following day he left for London.

CHAPTER XLIV

Now, for a week or more, she was to be left alone at Colerreddy with Richard, Harriet, Prudence, and the rain. Four miles away as the crow flies lay Pinetree, and Pinetree, she knew, was now safe, for the Marsdens were no longer there, the old farmer having fallen ill and left some weeks before for Plymouth. Only Harry was there, and one old man, and a couple of farm-hands who went at night to the village. At first she told herself that she would not go, not even to drink a cup of tea with him, not even if he sent her a message.

On the second day she felt convinced that such a message would come and hung about the house awaiting it, but Harry was silent.

That night she raged, convinced that he had forgotten her, since he made no attempt to reach her now that she was alone.

In the morning she was calm once more and ashamed of herself, and certain that he would make some excuse for riding over to Colerreddy. Then, of course, she would see him, but she wouldn't go with him, no, not she. He might whistle outside her window, as Lance had whistled for Celia, but it would be in vain, for she would hide herself. And she strove to evoke in her imagination her most attractive memories of her husband, to whom she would continue to be faithful. The day passed slowly, and when the sun had sunk in a fiery ball behind the gorse-bushes, there had come no word from Harry.

On the third day she tried desperately to forget him. She visited Harriet, bore with her snubs, and finally persuaded her to pour tea in the drawing-room, which she

did with all the dignity of an empress. She talked to Richard, whom she found glum and sulky, and fetched his newspaper from the carrier's cart as it returned to the village. She loitered in the kitchen and was told by Prudence that she looked like a heathen in her new red dress. Undaunted, she baked a cake, only to discover that, according to Prudence, her ignorance of cookery was lamentable.

That night she was restless and unhappy and lay awake for many hours while boards creaked, doors rattled, gutterspouts gurgled, soot blew down the chimneys, and all her world seemed plunged into a black, rain-drenched misery which offered no hope of alleviation or escape. At length she fell asleep with "escape"—how sweet a word it seemed!—upon her lips. It was late when she awoke, to find a clear, soft sun striving to pierce the fleecy greyness of the mist.

When she came downstairs, she knew with a nervous, fearful resignation that she could resist no longer. Yet the morning dragged on; Richard, yawning, went out on the moor for half-an-hour, returning to visit his horse and complain to the groom of its condition. Harriet, shivering in bed, demanded fresh peat for her fire and raged at Prudence when she was told that she must wait another hour before the fuel arrived.

"And you're a lazy madam and no mistake," the exasperated Prudence informed Camila, "lying late abed and Evelyn away frittering money in London. A fine pair of beggars on horseback!"

"Don't fret yourself, Prue. One day I'll take up my besom and the wind will carry me away—perhaps for good this time."

"That's witchen talk, and scarcely respectable into the bargain."

"Witches are very seldom respectable."

"How many shirts did you send Evelyn away with?"

"I don't know. I can't possibly remember."

"Because it's my belief he's lost one."

"Isn't it dinner-time, Prue?"

After the midday meal, she picked up her cloak and went forth openly from the front-door to find Harry. How simple it was! No one showed the least interest in her movements. She loitered on the way, knowing that he would be out in the fields, if she arrived too early. As she passed through the village, a very ancient man, with a beard like sheep's wool and a toothless mouth, stopped her to ask whether the moon-men were camped near by.

"The moon-men?"

"Aye. I be shuttin' up me chickens till 'em goes off."

She remembered suddenly that on the moor, in the old days, the gypsies were known as moon-men. She said mischievously, putting her red cloak about her face:

"They're staying for a week of Sundays, and their women know how to charm chickens from their roosts at night; so beware!"

"Moon-men, indeed!" put in a loud derisive voice, as the publican of the Magpie appeared from nowhere. "You silly old foolish fox, are you so blind as you can't recognise Mrs. Lovell of Coleruddy?"

"Moon-folk," grunted the old man, and hobbled away in high dudgeon.

"Don't you mind him, ma'am; he ain't just so and hasn't been for the last ten years. When's Mr. Lovell coming down to see us folks again? And Mr. Harry—that is if he keeps his fists to himself, for he's a rare lad when it comes to scrappin'."

"Is he?" Her heart warmed at the mention of his name.

"Indeed he is!"

And the publican talked of Harry for five or six minutes, while she smiled at him and gazed at him with her great black eyes, until he thought her a fine, handsome piece, Egyptian or no.

At length she left him and the village too, and found herself on a worn and rutted packhorse track. Now, in the

distance, on top of the hill, she caught a glimpse of the farm, set very far away, like a toy house amid a grove of tiny trees.

"I'll not stay," she thought, uncertain of herself. "Only some tea, and a bit of toast, and then I'll leave him."

For two miles she chose the longer path, wading through green billows of bracken, crushed and drenched by the night's rain, and she noticed sadly that already the brief, shy sun had vanished and it was as though vast grey wings had folded themselves about the sky. A trailing bramble clung to her dress and tore her stocking as she pulled it away ; a ditch lay in her path and she jumped it, and once or twice she thought she felt a drop of rain. Leaving the wilderness of the moor, she soon passed through the tawny gold of stubble fields, and the track became a rough and winding road. She passed through two gates, and crossed a field in which grazed a pair of brood mares. Then she was in the yard, her feet deep in yellow mud, melancholy poultry scattering before her approach. The ricks were rain-soaked and had lost their sunny yellow for a greyish tinge that obliterated all memories of the recent harvest, of the sweating reapers, and the proud ash-gold of the corn, and the dogs all barking to catch the frightened rabbits as only one last tall sun-baked clump remained unmown.

The farm-house was a small, ugly building fashioned from the quarry-stones of the district, grim, and prim, and weather-beaten, used to much battering from the four winds, its blank windows staring forth expressionless at the wild land that rolled so near its patchwork fields. It drew its name from the one lanky pine-tree that leaned askew in the vegetable-garden adjoining the little paved back-yard.

It was in this yard that Camila hesitated ; it was so long since she had visited the farm. She listened for a moment ; everything was silent. At length she unlatched the door and walked into the kitchen, where she was assailed by an outburst of furious barking. The dog was a half-bred collie,

a furtive, semi-wild creature, yellow-eyed, of more use to Harry than a shepherd.

"Be quiet, Fox," she whispered, putting out one hand that it might sniff and know her for Harry's friend, and glanced about her at the bare, silent room. A stone-flagged floor, a bright peat-fire, a table spread with the remains of a cold meal, a ham curing from the lowest beam, a dark grandfather clock with a guttural note, an illuminated text (relic of the Marsdens), Harry's gun in the corner, a basket of washing, a pair of muddy leggings, and in a box near the fire a black cat nuzzling a heap of blind kittens.

"Quiet, Fox," said Camila again, and the dog disappeared beneath the table. From the next room, however, came the sound of footsteps—woman's footsteps. She thought with a bitter fury, "He has a mistress," and waited, remaining still. But the woman who came into the room was a large, mottled, grizzled creature of fifty, with a shawl over her head and her skirts kilted for walking. She stared suspiciously at the visitor.

"Where's Mr. Lovell?" Camila demanded. "I'm his sister-in-law, come with a message from Colerreddy."

The woman thawed.

"He was eatin' his tea not five minutes past. Then he went out, but not for long. Would you be wantin' me? For I'm late, and should have been home along twenty minutes past."

"Oh, no, thank you. Please don't wait."

When the woman had gone, the kitchen seemed more deserted than ever. Camila put off her cloak and, cutting some bread from the table, made herself toast and boiled a fresh kettle for her tea. She gave milk to the cat and a bone to the dog, and then there was really nothing else to do but sit and wait for Harry.

In about twenty minutes he came in. She heard him stamping in the yard and shouting good-night to someone, and she sat still before the fire and made no sign. He shut the door behind him without looking in her direction, and

talked to Fox, who ran to him wagging his tail. She still sat quiet, unable, now that he had really come, to tell him of her presence. But she had not long to wait. He turned, and beholding in the dim light a strange figure before his fire, called out sharply :

"Who's that? Mrs. Richards? Why——" his voice changed and he paused.

"Camila. Well, Camila! You've surprised me, as you always said you would."

He came towards her, one hand in his pocket. The firelight illuminated his face with a red and vivid glare.

"I came," she said, "to have a cup of tea with you. But I was too late. You'd finished."

He laughed.

"A cup of tea and a bite of supper and then . . . well, then, I suppose, a bite of breakfast to-morrow morning and then a bite of dinner. And so on *ad lib.*, as the parson would say. You've been a long time coming, my angel."

"I haven't come to stay," she told him. "I only came for a little, because—because I wanted so much to see you that I couldn't endure it a moment longer."

"Oho. So that's it? You were lonely, were you?"

"Very, very lonely."

"Indeed? With Evelyn playing the fool in London? And you thought, no doubt, that an afternoon up here would be more agreeable than an afternoon at Cole-reddy? Do you miss Evelyn so much, Camila?"

"Don't you be harsh to me too," she pleaded softly.

He bent down to put some more peat on the fire.

CHAPTER XLV

“What is it?” she continued, as he remained silent.

“Only this. That when you spoke of coming here, you gave me to understand that it would be for good. Now you tell me that it was for a cup of tea—because you were lonely, with Evelyn away.”

“Why didn’t you ask me the last few days, Harry?”

“Why the last few days more than any other time?”

“Because of Evelyn.”

“Do you really suppose that the fact of Evelyn being in London makes any difference to me? Do you, by any chance, imagine me to be afraid of him? I told you, when we talked by the cedar-tree, that you were free to come and that I wanted you. I haven’t changed, Camila. What has Evelyn to do with it?”

“Everything, I think,” she sighed.

“And don’t speak of him any more—we’ve other matters to settle. If you’ve come only to tantalise me, the quicker you go the better. Do you want me to turn the key on you, Camila?”

“No.”

“Then what do you want?”

“Only to be free to go in a little while.”

“In Heaven’s name, why?”

“I told you, didn’t I,” she reminded him, “that I would leave him when he was unkind or had grown tired of me. Well, he has done neither. And yet I couldn’t not come to you while I had the chance, could I?”

“You can go away now,” he told her, “as quickly as you came, since you insist on returning to Coleruddy. I’ll have you for keeps or not at all. So take your choice.”

“ Oh, Harry ! ”

She came towards him, where he sprawled in his chair, crept close, slid her arm about his neck, and kissed his mouth. He still seemed unresponsive.

“ Harry, please ! I’ve had a long walk. Don’t turn me away for a little while. Not until it’s dark. Won’t you let me bide until then ? ”

A pause. She waited, trembling.

He said at length :

“ You know how much I want you here. For this one time you can bide and then go back. For this one time. But I think you must be a witchwoman to take delight in crossing me.”

For some time she lay still, her heart beating fast. He put his hands against her ribs, as though to imprison it like a bird.

“ For this one time,” he repeated again.

“ It’s getting dark, Harry.”

“ What of it ? Listen, Camila, I’ll drive you back and set you down near Colereddy. So you can stay longer, much longer. As for the dark—I’ll get candles, and we’ll forget it.”

“ No. I like it. Will you swear to drive me home ? ”

“ Yes.”

She murmured, stroking his face :

“ You remind me of a gypsy man, but you’re more gentle, more to be loved.”

He laughed.

“ Send me any gypsy and I’ll thrash him. Then we’ll see who’s the better man. Without the gloves, on a fair bit of ground, and you’d not recognise your gypsy when I’d finished with him.”

“ My gypsy ? ” she raised her head abruptly. “ Harry, listen. The other day, when Evelyn was talking to me of my gypsy, as you call him, I told him something that I regretted. Shall I tell you ? ”

“ If you like.”

"He took me off to Cornwall, you know, to a land that Evelyn insists is drowned and has no existence, but which I can assure you is very fair, blossoming with many flowers, and left me there, because I was ill."

"You were ill?" He was incredulous.

"Yes. Very ill. And I can remember very little of that time. But Harry, I've never told anyone what happened to me there in Lyonesse—the one thing that I can remember of that place, except that it was beautiful, and that I wept to leave it."

"What happened?"

"I was ill because I had a baby before my time. The gypsy's baby. They'd tramped me off my feet and laughed when I told them I was tired. When I fell ill, they left me near this place. My baby was born dead. When I knew that it was dead, I screamed until I fell into some sort of fit and lost my senses. Then, afterwards, I forgot all that had happened; but I think that there were people, very strange people, who showed me kindness, great kindness. Then the gypsy got me away again, and when I saw him, I remembered my baby, my poor dead baby that had been left I don't know where. Afterwards, I always dreamed of it, all grey and cold and shrunken, crying to get at me, angry because I had taken no care of it and let it die. In every churchyard I thought I saw it groping, trying to find its way out; at night, in the tent, I was sure I heard its voice in the wind outside. Even at Colerreddy, just before I married Evelyn, I thought it sobbed outside my window. . . . Oh, Harry, you had to hear that story to understand a little why I married and why I went to Mrs. Fell! If—you see if I had had another, I think perhaps the little dead one would leave me in peace."

She was crying now, but more from fear than grief. It had grown quite dark, and as he caught her fast, they heard outside, rumbling towards them from the moor, the sulky grumble of distant thunder. She wiped her eyes and drew away from him.

"There ! I've brought you a storm, in addition to my dreary stories. You'd better let me out of your door before I ill-wish you without knowing it."

"You've brought me yourself. Nothing else is of the slightest importance. Even the gypsy doesn't count, although if I had him here, I'd half-kill him and then make him lick your shoes. As for the child, you were ailing at the time and dreamed it haunted you, but never mind—one day, when you come here to live with me, you shall have another—eh, Camila ?—and then you'll think of Colerreddy no more !"

As he kissed her, the room was lit up for a second by the white and jagged fire of lightning, followed immediately by a violent crash of thunder.

"Oh, I can't go back yet !" she said. "I must bide with you till the storm's over."

His dark eyes slanted just above hers ; his black hair, rough and wild, and his pointed ears combined to give him a faun-like appearance, as he drew closer towards her in the red glow of the firelight. She thought of him once again as a creature fashioned of the very moor itself, one who was wilder than the shyest beast, stronger even than the thunder, darker, deeper than those meres upon which the sun never falls.

"Harry, you mustn't."

But a little later, when the storm broke above their heads, she had no longer any thought of it, for the storm and Harry were one and the same. For a long time there was nothing in the world but Harry.

"Now," he said at last, "you'll stay—for good and all."

There was a note of triumph in his voice that she vaguely resented.

"Oh, no," she said, "you shan't catch me that way. You swore to drive me home."

"Home !"

"Yes. Home to Colerreddy."

"Camila, are you a madwoman? Or is it that you have no love for me?"

She went over towards the window; outside the night was grown calmer; the storm no longer raged.

"I have a great love for you," she said, "a most terrible love it is, for it seems to possess me, body and soul, like a demon. But still I don't belong to you, and when you make a bargain, you must keep to it."

"I suppose you belong to Evelyn?"

"You know that's not true."

"Then to whom—Old Nick?"

"Wrong once more. I belong to no one. If things were different, you know that I would come up here. But as it is, having married Evelyn, I must remain with him, while he wants me."

He said, furious:

"You shan't come here again unless you stay."

"I don't suppose I shall have another opportunity."

"I could keep you by force, if I wanted."

"That's what Evelyn was pleased to inform me the other day. I told him what I tell you now, that if he shut me up, I'd jump from the windows and dash myself to the ground."

"You sicken me when you talk of Evelyn. Do you suppose he's not taking his pleasure in London?"

"If he is, I don't mind. If it were you, I'd be mad with jealousy at the thought of it."

"But if you care so little for him——"

"Oh, Harry," she protested, "please let us not spoil tonight by fighting. While he wants me, and while he treats me well, I shall stay with him. That's my last word."

"And my last word," he told her, dark with anger, "is not to come here again unless you care enough for me to leave them all for ever. Otherwise you'll find my door barred. Stay away—or come for good. Do you understand at last?"

"Yes."

"And you still wish to go?"

"I must. Shall I help you harness the pony?"

"No. Wait here."

Left alone in the kitchen, she observed with incredulous amazement that the night was nearly over. It was cold, too, and she shivered, for the fire had sunk and died, and the hearth was grey with ashes. The cat, miauling, crept from its basket to rub its warm, snake-like body against her legs. When she bent to stroke it, she saw that its fixed and glaring eyes held in the dark the green, malevolent fire of emeralds. The grandfather clock, hesitating for one brief moment in its solemn record of racing time, unfaltering and merciless, uttered a wheezy hiccupping sound, then once more pulled itself together. She wrapped herself in her cloak and tried to smooth her wild hair, but there was no mirror in Harry's room.

At length, in the yard, she heard the clatter of hooves and knew that it was time to go. Harry appeared in the doorway, chasing his dog before him.

"Quick, Camila. I want to shut in Fox while I'm gone."

She closed the door behind her and climbed into the trap. The night-air, cool after the storm, seemed fresh as iced and sparkling wine. Harry clicked his tongue as the moorland pony, starting forward, began to bear them swiftly away from the dark farm-house. He was silent. When they reached the gates, she climbed down to hold them open for him, and he waited motionless until she was once more beside him. When they were out upon the road, she glanced appealingly in the direction of his straight and sullen profile.

"Harry."

"What is it?"

"You seem to prize me very little. Are you always going to be surly because I can't break up my life for you?"

"We have talked enough of that."

"I wonder if you realise what a great love for you I have?"

"I wonder if you realise how much in awe of Evelyn you are?"

"Oh, Harry . . . you know it isn't that. Only, if we are foolish enough to make bargains, we must keep to them. And perhaps one day, quite suddenly, he'll tire of me. And then I shall be free."

He glanced at her. Then, unsmiling, thoughtful, he suggested :

"Has it ever occurred to you that I might weary of waiting and find some other woman ? "

"Yes. It occurs to me very often, Harry. I know you're a hard man to cross."

"How much, I wonder, would you mind ? "

She said impetuously : "So much that I'd rather return to the Egyptians, knowing that you loved me, than live in comfort at Colerreddy while you kept another woman. So much that, if it could make you faithful to me, I'd as lief not have another child and bear with the one that died, even if it had the power to mischief me through my window. So much that I'd rather be ducked as a witchwoman by all the moor people and set in the stocks as a sorceress. I'd laugh then, if in the end I knew that we could come together, and rejoice as though they were feasting me. . . . As much as that—and more."

Her emotion touched his heart. He knew then that, in spite of his anger, it was impossible to be as cruel to her as he had determined. He was exasperated by her obstinacy, but he was still bewitched, and thought he always would be, by the potency of her strange, mysterious charm.

"Don't fret yourself," he said shortly, "there's no need. I've eyes for no other woman, nor ever will have. So you can set your heart at rest. You can come whenever you've a mind, so long as you mean to stay for good and all, amen. But you can go elsewhere when you're in need of company for a cup of tea."

"Yes, I daresay now you want no other woman. It would be strange if you did, in view of the love we feel for one another. But as the months pass, and the rain falls again, and no sign from me, you might begin to think it more

cheerful, of a long evening, to have some woman like Jennifer Crowland mending for you, and lighting your candles, and ready to kiss you when you've nothing better to do."

He was silent, for they both knew that she spoke the truth.

As they approached Colerreddy, she crept closer to him, fearful of this parting that might endure for months, perhaps for years.

She asked him, trying to make her voice sound natural :

"You'll be coming down now and again for a word with your father? He misses you when you're too long away."

"As little as possible," he answered grimly. "The temptation to wring Evelyn's pretty neck might sooner or later prove irresistible."

"But you'll see him at the farm, Harry, and you won't——"

"Oh, at the farm! I've no particular ambition to see him with you, that's all."

Now the house lay before them, a dark solid mass, wreathed in its circlet of fir-trees.

"How will you get in, Camila?"

"The kitchen window's loose. I can always unlatch it from outside."

"Then there's nothing more to say. I know your views—you know mine."

"No, there's something that you've left unsaid. I shall always think of this night as divine, although there are others who might possibly say it might better be called devilish. What is your opinion?"

"It's difficult to know. With you, the two become one and the same. It's hard to say which is which. All I know is, you cast so strange and deep a spell that I almost wonder whether you've a besom hidden away somewhere and could have got home quicker without my pony."


"That means you still love me as much as the day we talked by the cedar-tree?"

"As much? Much more, thanks to your Egyptian mischief. Now you've left some part of yourself, your living ghost, perhaps, behind you at the farm, so that I shall be for ever haunted by your presence. I think, Camila, I shall sometimes hear your footsteps running down the stair and catch no glimpse of you, or hear your laugh, perhaps, sounding close at my ear, coming to me from nowhere. And then Fox will growl, staring at a blank wall, and I shall know what is meant when people whisper over their fires of gypsy magic."

"Oh, don't talk as though I meant you ill. I love you so—I'll always love you."

"Then for God's sake think over what I've said to you to-night"; and, kissing her hastily, he jumped into his cart, turning the pony so sharply that it reared and stumbled. She stood in the middle of the lane watching the twin fireflies that were his lamps become gradually more distant, until they disappeared. Then, for a long time, she could still hear the brisk clatter of the pony's shoes. Straining her ear, she listened until they became very faint, a sound almost like the tiny staccato ticking of a clock. Soon there was silence. She realised vaguely that it was nearly dawn; already the sky was argent-pale. She turned slowly in the direction of the kitchen window.

One sharp pull and it was open. She slid rapidly, like a snake, through the aperture. The window closed softly behind her, and once more Colerreddy was wrapped in the grave, dark mantle of its silence. The wind had died down; even the crests of the fir-trees were still, as though they listened, for ever mute, like stiff goblin trees against the silver of the sky.



PART V

FLAMENCO

CHAPTER XLVI

Evelyn returned home after a fortnight, with twenty pounds in his pocket and a smile of the utmost satisfaction on his face. He had, he said, made friends with Mr. Abels, and Mr. Abels, who thought his paintings "quaint," had, in addition to buying three of them, invited him to dinner at his house in Russell Square. He did not let his family know that Mrs. Abels, a voluptuous blonde of forty-five, with a complexion like Turkish Delight and a marked predilection for very young men, had fallen madly in love with him. Such, however, was the case.

Evelyn, dazed as he was by all the glitter and luxury and pomp of a great city, found, after the first three days of metropolitan life, that in London money was a stark necessity, whereas at Colerreddy it had never seemed of much importance. He stayed at a modest hostel near Charing Cross, ate simple meals at cheap eating-houses, and found that he was growing poorer and poorer. It only remained for Mrs. Abels to invite him to tea while her husband was away in the country at an auction sale. She was spoiled, amorous, sly, foolish, and generous. To her, Evelyn was a pale, beautiful spirit sent from some enchanted land to console her for all that was tedious, dry, aloof, and uninteresting in her husband. Deliberately, skillfully, she set out to capture him, fascinated, even as Camila once had been, by the serene aloofness that cloaked his self-absorption.

At first he was amused, then timid, then eagerly alert. Calmly, impersonally, he set about turning this situation to his own advantage. She was a valuable ally and might

become a dangerous enemy. His tongue in his cheek, he played to perfection the rôle of a shy, unpractical dreamer exquisitely and gradually aroused by the tender sympathy of an older woman. Then when her passion for him had begun to burn most furiously, he told her vaguely that he must go home to his wife. In anguish, she begged him, almost on her knees, for another week.

"Another week?" he said. "But that's impossible. You forget that I'm a farmer, not an artist; each day I spend in London means future poverty for me."

She whispered, stroking his hair, that he mustn't worry—she would see to it that his finances should not suffer—he was too beautiful and dear to think of money.

He sighed, bending his fair head; it was fortunate, indeed, that she could not see his smiling mouth. He stayed another four days and then returned home with his triumphant story of twenty pounds made out of his pictures. About a more substantial sum, pressed tactfully into his hand by Lucy Abels, he kept very quiet indeed.

"You swear to come again in the spring?" she whispered tearfully.

"In the spring—yes, I'll come then. Otherwise, how could I endure our parting?"

But he smiled once more as he walked away from Russell Square.

And so she was left, this plump, golden-haired, lonely lady, to sigh and mope in her overcrowded sitting-room, with only the sooty plane-trees of the Square to look upon, and her husband to bore her with talk of his new discoveries. (There was apparently a young Mr. Landseer whose landscapes made poor Evelyn's appear even cruder than they really were.) She paid but little attention. The boughs of the plane-trees were soon black and naked; she thought of the spring, and the spring to her meant Evelyn, with his grace and youth and primrose locks of hair. The winter, in London, seemed interminable.

Evelyn himself was charmed to find, after a surfeit of

more florid charms, his dark, lithe, docile gypsy. How gentle she was, and thoughtful for his comfort, how strong and gracious and beautiful and kind! She was silent, too, more silent, perhaps, than she had been before, but this, after Mrs. Abel's sophisticated chatter, was a relief more precious than balm. Yet he was shrewd enough to write a long, prudent letter to his Lucy; a letter in which he described in picturesque detail the rude and swarthy moorland near which he toiled, the love he felt for London, and his intention of re-visiting the metropolis when spring came once more. He sent her a sprig of white heather for luck; he was too deeply moved by her hospitality to write more, but he kissed her hands and remained her obedient and grateful servant.

Then, in high spirits, he went in search of Camila. Soon, however, he was to be mightily astonished by his wife. She said to him one morning with the greatest calm:

"Evelyn, I must tell you something. I think that we—that I am going to have a child."

"A child?"

He sat there in his shirt, gaping at her, his hair on end.

"Yes. I am almost sure. It should be in about eight months from now. I didn't want to tell you until I was certain."

He was silent for such a long time that she glanced at him enquiringly. His face was averted, and he ran his fingers through his untidy locks with a gesture at once agitated and helpless.

"Evelyn, aren't you glad?"

"I suppose I am."

"Then what's the matter?"

"I'm too young to have a child thrust on me before I'm twenty."

"Well," she said, "I'm younger than you, and it seems to me that I shall have the more disagreeable time. If I can stand it, you can."

"We're both too young."

"We were not too young to marry."

"Oh, marriage! How can I support a child?"

"You own half the farm."

He turned upon her in a rage.

"I hate the farm! I'm an artist, and I won't continue to wade all my life in mud and dung for you or anyone else. Do you understand that?"

"Then sell some more pictures."

"I'm not going back to London until the spring."

"At least," she reminded him, "we get fed and housed here by your father."

"My father's a sick man."

"Yet you own half the farm."

"The farm," he told her vindictively, "is good enough for Harry, who lives like an animal. I happen to be more sensitive and more intelligent. I was never bred for a farmer."

Her face became cold and expressionless. She was glad that she was deceiving him, that she was going to bear Harry's child. She thought with a fierce joy of the night up at Pinetree and at that moment hated her husband. But she said no more, only smiled secretively and reminiscently.

"There's nothing to rejoice about," he told her angrily.

"I happen to think differently. I'm happy. This is my child, since you dislike it so much, and I'm not afraid. Indeed, I love it already."

And she spoke the truth, for since she had known that she was pregnant, she had ceased to think of the dead baby, whose small, malignant ghost had for so long menaced her, the poor, ugly, dead baby sired by black sorcery or by Brazil the gypsy. Indeed, she had wondered for some weeks whether or not the whole fantastic story was not, perhaps, a dream; Lyonesse, that drowned faery land where she had born the dead child; the baby itself, grey and withered in its tiny shroud, pursuing her relentlessly, so tired and angry and revengeful and in need of rest. Perhaps, she had mused,

before she told Evelyn this new and lovely secret,—perhaps the whole incident was unreal, the fruit of an unnerved hysterical imagination nurtured on cruelty and neglect and sickness. And yet she thought that she could not have dreamed of Lyonesse ; the name alone tolled in her ears like the wild, low music of elfland ; and somewhere, very remote and deeply hidden in her mind, lay strange and half-forgotten memories ; showers of delicate blossom, the chime of bells that tinkled with a deep and poignant sweetness, savours more fragrant than those of incense, and, vaguer still, the shadowy images of vague and radiant creatures, brighter than the sun, stronger than the storm, who had tended her and guarded her during this strange and faery period of her life.

Moon-people. That was what, in the old days, the moor-folk had called the gypsies. She had heard, too, that the Egyptians and the faery people were often thought to be one and the same. These things she could not understand ; but now that she carried in her womb a human child, Harry's child, she feared the powers of darkness not at all. Brazil, who might for aught she knew have been Satan himself, the ghostly demon brat that had so much tormented her, these mattered no more. Even the Wild Swan was forgotten. There remained only the child that she was soon to bear—the living, powerful, mortal child that Evelyn could never have given her.

Behind her receded the strange, unhappy past ; faintly but insistently there had long echoed in her ears the ghostly laughter of the *flamenco* music to which she had been born ; nor had the taint of Coleruddy escaped her, since she could not, it seemed, be faithful to her husband and since Richard himself had betrayed her to the Egyptians before she knew her mind ; Harry, too, dark and mocking, like some faun crept up from the moorland to seduce her, had brought her no peace, only that wild unrest to which she seemed predestined ; yet, unconsciously, Harry had liberated her from a black and bitter prison. Nothing else mattered, save

that she was to bear this child, this strong and living child. Like her mother before her, she was already wrapped in a strange aloofness and secret joy that admitted of no participation. Suddenly, for no reason at all, she thought once more of the Wild Swan ; its appearance, she decided, must have prophesied the happiness that she was now experiencing. Perhaps that last vision of the supernatural bird, seen as she lay all night on the heather before her return to Coleruddy, also prophesied happiness for this unborn child of Harry's.


She smiled once more in what Harry would have called her "prideful" fashion, and Evelyn, already jealous, glanced across at her resentfully.

"Oh, don't spoil it!" she besought ; for although she was still sorry for him and angry with herself, he had never seemed part of her life since his return from London. The two of them, Harry and the child, had between them succeeded in relegating him completely to the background.

"You'll drive me to London again," he told her bitterly.

"If you can sell more pictures and make us independent, I shall encourage you to go."

He thought vindictively of Mrs. Abels. No, he couldn't, he wouldn't go back there until winter was over. He knew so well that to this plump romantic he symbolised the spring. It would destroy everything if he returned to her while the crocuses in the square garden were buried beneath drifts of smutty snow. No, he must wait. But he grumbled below his breath.



CHAPTER XLVII

Two months went by before Harry appeared at Colerreddy. At length he wandered in one afternoon of wind and rain to visit his father. Camila, catching sight of him in the hall, where he brushed the sleet off his coat, felt once more that wild excited leaping of the heart that turned her giddy, almost faint.

“Harry !”

He turned swiftly, glanced furtively about him, and then took a step towards her.

“Do you know about me ?” she whispered, almost overcome by the unexpectedness of this encounter, by his nearness to her, the damp elf-locks of his black hair, his cheek, oaken-brown, his dark and hardy eye that stared into her own.

He nodded.

“It’s your child.”

“I know. You’d better have done with all this foolishness and come up to Pinetree after it’s born.”

“Never, now. I couldn’t serve it like that. It must have the best I can do for it. I’ll not have it treated as a bastard. Not even for you.”

“Then don’t waylay me again, if it’s only to torment me.”

He left her at that and went down the passage to Richard’s study. She was alone in the hall, and now that the soft murmur of their whispering voices was stilled, she felt that she must have dreamed his dark disquieting presence. But she was white, and her legs felt weak. He had almost conquered her ; never, never again must she see him save in the presence of others.

So she dragged herself to Harriet's room, where she was at first coldly received and then treated to an alarmingly frank account of Harriet's varied experiences of childbirth.

She argued, still unconsciously fighting Harry :

"Those matters don't affect me. I'm a gypsy, bred to have my child out on the moor, in snow or sleet or rain. We're stronger, I think, than other women."

And Harriet, at her most Georgian :

"There is naught to brag of, my girl, in low and vulgar antecedents."

Yet, when she would have gone, Harriet detained her. Not for London town itself would the elder woman have admitted to any feeling, other than of contempt, for the Egyptian ; yet there was no denying that she took a strange, perverse pleasure in conversing with her daughter-in-law. The origin of this curious attraction was possibly that she had, in spite of herself, an odd respect, tinged with awe, for Camila's independence. For all she might rate and scold the gypsy, she realised full well that beyond a certain point she could not go without such retaliation as she much disliked, being now less ready than the younger woman at sharp-tongued repartee. This wife of Evelyn's was no longer the dusky changeling child once dismissed so scornfully to eat its meals in the kitchen, but a tall grown woman, handsome and experienced, yet to Harriet—another source of secret pleasure—always a social inferior. Very often, watching the gypsy when her eyes were sparkling and she tossed her dark head with such wild defiance, it delighted Harriet to imagine the girl's confusion were she to be projected, by some sorcerer's wand, into a glittering London ballroom of the past, a ballroom like those in which once, cool and self-confident, Harriet herself had held sway. Sooner or later, however, came the damping reflection that Camila cared for none of these things,—only for the moor, and wildness, and gypsy people, and perhaps for Harry.

Harriet, shrewd and worldly still, in spite of her clouded

mind, knew instinctively that somehow, sooner or later, Harry and Camila must love one another. It was to her inevitable, this mutual passion, woven as it was of wilfulness and strength, of grudging admiration, of wild appetites, and of a total lack of any discipline other than that dictated by their savage and untamed natures. Evelyn, with all his silver gaiety, his gentle, shallow selfishness, seemed to his ironical mother no more than a mere pawn in this game that was yet to be played out by the other two against the stormly moorland background that became them both so admirably. Seeing Camila pregnant, Harriet mused sardonically. Yet, fearing her daughter-in-law, she remained silent. She cared little enough for any of them, but, as she herself said, she became each day more like a woman at the play, watching, detached and cynically critical, the gambols of a troupe of mummers.

Camila went with her needlework to the window. As she sewed, she tried to picture her own birth, which she imagined to have taken place in some swarthy Andalusian thicket, where flies swarmed and the sun glowered and they drowned the groaning of her mother in a wild, triumphant twanging of *flamenco* tunes. "*Flamenco*," she mused, was yet another term for the gypsies and their strange, unholy music. *Flamenco*, moon-men, Calés, Romanies ! How many sweet and curious names had at one time or other been coined for that dark restless breed, for ever tramping alien roads, that were said by some to be akin to the Faery or Hidden People !

Soon she grew tired of sewing, and, seeing Harriet nod, stared out of the uncurtained windows at the luminous and roving twilight without. There, in the wildness of rain-lashed mist, she would once have heard the whimpering of the dead ghost-child ; now there was nothing, only a great peace and silence. Harry's child, still unborn, had already chased the little spectre away. Soon, in the spring, the living child would be in her arms. She was so happy that she could have wept.

When Richard entered the room, she did not hear him until he called her name.

"What is it?" she said, glancing quickly at Harriet. But Harriet was now heavily asleep.

Richard came across to the window-seat and sat down beside her.

"Camila, a word of advice."

"I am all attention."

"Now that you are breeding, you must think of certain things. Evelyn, for instance. His heart no longer seems here with you, or at the farm, but in London, with his fine friends."

She was so completely indifferent that she was hard put to it to pretend discomfiture. She murmured, with a sigh, that she was sorry, but unable to help him.

"To-day," Richard continued, stifling a yawn, "Harry tells me that he is willing to buy Evelyn's share of the farm—that Evelyn is eager to sell. You know best. Has Evelyn some secret store of money?"

"I have no idea. He never talks to me of business."

"Does he propose, then, to live in London?"

She came back to life with a start.

"If he does, he may go alone. I could never live there. And my baby—it must be brought up here at Colerreddy, as we were all brought up, amid the moor, and sunshine, and the fresh air. I'll not have it stifled by the soot and fog of London."

Richard said grimly:

"You *would* marry him. You'd listen to no one. Now, if you fall out, you may have to turn to me for advice."

"Why not? You're my friend, aren't you? You don't want me to go away?"

"Your friend?" he seemed somnolent, perplexed, appearing to turn towards the past. "I served you ill, Camila, once, when I wanted you for myself. I must make amends somehow, or die unsatisfied, when my day comes. I'll stop him going to London if I can."

"Thank you."

But she was almost apathetic, thinking only of the child and of Harry. She could never leave the neighbourhood while Harry lived there.

Richard was in a gloomy mood. He went on :

"Do you remember once, Camila, when you prevented me from committing murder in this very room?"

And he glanced across at Harriet, still fast asleep, her turbaned head nodding in her lap; her sharp, wolfish mouth half-open to reveal her teeth.

"Oh, don't let's rake that up. It's over and done with, as is the time when I went with Egyptian men. Those things are finished, now that I am with child."

He sighed gustily. It seemed to her as though, since he had appeared, the night had become more melancholy than the last chrysanthemum flower of autumn. He said, after a pause :

"I wanted you so much, once. Old age is damnable. You still have all your life before you. I'm finished, spent, like the fireworks I remember at Vauxhall, when I used to go there as a lad, in search of pleasure."

She was silent.

His wasted past, still faintly aglow with the vainglorious aspirations that had come to naught, seemed to hedge him about, as he sat there in the waning dusk, with a host of sad, invisible ghosts that pointed to him, mutely reproaching him with all that he might have done.

"Oh, poor Richard!" she exclaimed suddenly, and put her hand on his.

"On the contrary," he told her, "not poor so much as foolish. Foolish Richard. By God, I was a fool, when I was young. If it had been myself alone . . . but it wasn't. It was Harriet there. I ruined her life. And once she was so gay and saucy, and made you die of laughing. And then the boys—they've been bred as peasants, and Harry should have been in the army and Evelyn—well, at least, he might have played *cavaliere servante* to some fine lady, and

not caught you and stuffed you in a cage. But this brat of yours—him, at least, we'll bring up as a gentleman. No mud and manure and ploughboy friends for him ! We'll teach him Greek and Latin, and later, perhaps, send him to some fine school where he'll have other playmates than moor-ponies and tinkers' brats."

She smiled, still stroking his hand.

"Perhaps it will be a girl."

"In that case she shall learn her catechism and the sampler, and consort with other young ladies in the most genteel academy in the south of England !"

Suddenly she withdrew her hand and asked him :

"Richard, tell me something about my parents. All you can remember. Please ! I've never asked this question before."

He hesitated, plainly confused. She persisted.

"Please, Richard. This isn't idle curiosity. It concerns the child, too. What sort of grandparents has he on his mother's side ? Don't be afraid to tell me—after Brazil, nothing, I think, could shock me."

He said, picking his words carefully :

"They had courage. When I found them, they were starving, but they bore themselves coolly enough. Hunger, fatigue, these words meant little enough to them. They had tramped here from Spain, were tramping to America, or rather to Plymouth, in search of a ship. They were dark as crows, and laughed often. They spoke in some soft, secret tongue of their own. They gave you sidelong glances, and seemed to read your thoughts. Music, their own strange music that they called '*flamenco*,' meant more to them than food or drink."

"What sort of man was my father ?"

He stammered :

"A rogue, but a likable rogue. He squinted, but his eye twinkled. The presence of an emperor wouldn't have abashed him. He had great authority over the others."

"A murderer, wasn't he ?"

"A murderer? How should I know? His code was different from ours—no doubt he defended himself with his knife, but such, I believe, has ever been the custom of the Spanish."

"And my mother?" she pursued relentlessly.

Here he was on safer ground.

"She was thin and dark and witchy, with lumps of gold stuck in her ears. She had been handsome, but when I saw her, she was ravaged by hunger. She had never heard the word 'fear.' She was indifferent to pain and sickness and want and cold. She bore her child here in my stable. A few hours later she was on the road. She had even more courage than the others."

"And the sister who danced?"

He reflected. Never, he thought, would the memory of that vivid and ferocious performance be completely obliterated from his mind. He still remembered, with a disconcerting clearness, the flaming vitality of the wicked music, the fiendish, lascivious gaiety of the transported dancer. He cleared his throat.

"She—your sister—was witchy, too, but small, and seemed lighter than a feather. When she danced, it was as though her body were afire. But when she was still, she was not even comely. You are the beauty of the family."

"Were they very wild?" she persisted.

"Wild? Yes. At first, I remember, when I met them near the Tor, I thought them elf-folk crept up from the marshes. They walked, too, as though the wind blew them, not as other people move. Sometimes, when they were busy with other affairs, they snapped their fingers without knowing that they did so, as though their diabolical music must for ever echo in their ears. Perhaps it did; they never gave me their confidence."

He paused, but she could see how clearly he remembered the events of many years ago. Grown faint, the music of the *flamenco* still had power to stir his senses; blurred by the passing of time, their dark and wicked faces still danced


before his eyes with their sombre glow, as though he stared at rippling reflections in some deep and shadowed pool. Somewhere, perhaps, he heard still the grinding wheels of gypsy carts plunging through rut and mire, intent only upon travelling a road that had no end, a road that girdled the earth and then swept back again ; the fascination of the moon-folk would never entirely leave him, though they must long ago have forgotten this man, who had meant so little in the roving, colourful life that held in store each day a new and splendid or sordid adventure.

And, indeed, how could he ever forget, when she herself, the daughter of Bohemia, sat there beside him, flaunting all the panoply of her race—dark, secret lashes, golden-olive cheeks, and the bloom of black hair like ripe blackberries upon which the sun has fallen ? She meant no more to him now than some exotic picture or noble pagan statue ; yet there she was, carrying his son's child, knit somehow into his life and the life of his family—the *gitana*, apart, inscrutable, untamed, and secret. Of her loves and hates he knew nothing. She was more cunning than the serpent, yet instinctively he surmised that Evelyn could not hold her for long. And the child ? And her future ? These were dim to him.

Emphatically he repeated :

“ Whether it's a boy or girl, we must do our best for this brat of yours.”

She nodded acquiescence. But of what was she really thinking ? He brooded until darkness fell, but the *gitana* continued to elude him and to remain an enigma.



CHAPTER XLVIII

For Evelyn the winter dragged. His work at Pinetree had become a hideous burden, his brother was grimmer and more sullen than ever before, and when at night he returned home, it irritated him exceedingly to observe that Camila, whose lithe grace he had once so much admired, seemed to have become each day clumsier, heavier, more awkward and less agile in her movements. Had she complained of her condition, he would at once have overwhelmed her with an access of emotional sympathy and pitied her as much as he was capable of pitying anyone ; her serene content, her joyful anticipation of this tremendous upheaval that was to come, only succeeded in infuriating him. She had, he thought irritably, no right to be happy, since she was so soon to suffer. Nor had she any right to flout him as she did, ignoring his demands and paying so little attention whenever he talked to her. She had become as remote from him as he had ever been from her in the early days of adolescence ; now, in their room, when he awoke to find her black head lying near to his on the pillow, he experienced the curious sensation of one who, during the night, has had a stranger thrust beside him in his bed ; his influence over her seemed daily to wane. Once, long ago, she had been his faithful slave ; later, after their marriage, she had borne his grievances with a tolerant good-humour, sometimes, it was true, flaring into anger, but always repenting afterwards and (he remembered) especially seductive at such moments.

Now she was so aloof that it seemed impossible to touch her. Rage, flattery, caresses, snubs—all left her cold. Sometimes, when he was talking of his pictures or of London or of

Richard's laziness or of Harriet's latest vagary, he surprised upon her vivid face an expression which the moor-people would have described as "fey," but for which he had himself no name. A strange look, at once defiant and tender, grave and gay, sinister and peaceful, yet above all secret, as though she had drawn down shutters before her very soul.

"Oh, Camila, you don't love me any more."

And then she would turn her great eyes upon him and answer kindly enough that he knew nothing of these matters, being so young, but that she could assure him women were the same, all over the world, during those last months before their children were born.

He said no more, but addressed himself to Richard before supper, at which hour he was usually at his most alert.

"My mother—," Evelyn enquired, "was she silent and solitary, like Camila, before Harry was born?"

"Silent?"

Richard considered, sucking his pipe.

At length he shook his head.

"Silent, no. Has she ever been silent? I recollect her as very pettish, storming and railing when her fine gowns fitted her no longer and she was unable to seek her amusement at balls and routs."

"I would rather see them thus," said Evelyn, with the melancholy of disillusioned maturity. "Vapours, sobs—all that is to be expected. But this silence of Camila's, this air of seeming to triumph over me, her maddening indifference to my every wish, her inattention to all I say—that's strange and not like her, for she's pleasant enough at normal times, and a fine wife, as you know."

Richard laughed.

"Do you happen to remember the mother?"

"No," said Evelyn sulkily, "and I've no wish to be reminded of her."

He looked little and slight as he stood there before the fire, and his light curling hair made him seem peculiarly

childish. And he was not yet twenty. The idea of this boy fathering Camila's gypsy brat suddenly seemed to Richard excessively amusing. He smothered another grin with his hand and muttered hastily :

" Oh, leave her in peace ! leave her in peace ! It'll not be long now."

" I suppose," Evelyn continued, " I must ride to the surgeon and explain to him when he'll be wanted ? "

" They say," Richard told him, meaning by " they " Jennifer Crowland, " that Mother Fell, down at the village, is of more use at such times than fifty leeches."

" A witchwoman," sneered Evelyn. " I'd rather call in the horse-doctor."

" You may have to, if t'other is over-worked. I've always heard they take turn and turn about. I advise Mother Fell."

Evelyn, disdaining to argue further, left the room with dignity. He went out to saddle his pony and rode off to Pinetree in a mist of soft and languid rain. Soon his hair clung in rings to his forehead and his legs were spattered to the thigh with mud. He envied Lucy Abels, reclining like a plump cat in her stuffy sitting-room in Russell Square, with a flour-headed lackey ready to minister to her simplest want. Soon, after the child was born, he would go to London again, and this time he would stay away a month and make himself exceedingly agreeable to Lucy. And later, perhaps, when his father was older, he would persuade Harry to buy his share of the farm, and then he could live as he pleased, painting if he wished, dallying with Camila, and seeking Lucy whenever he was in the mood for more sophisticated gaiety and diversion.

" Oh, get on ! " he told the pony, and dug his heels into its hairy flanks.

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Rain-drenched for weeks, the dark, swampy moorland, chilled and bitten by the dreary scourging winter, began in

February to wear the clean look of early spring. There was a freshness in the earth that smelt sweet and windswept, and pure as the snowdrops that soon began to cluster in the hollows, like plumage dropped from swans that would soon fly northwards ; already the wild geese were on their way. Sometimes the sky was as greenish-blue as the pale, mottled egg of the blackbirds, and then, like mirrors, the pools of water in the fens held tremulous reflections tinted like forget-me-nots, blurred with drifts of scurrying cloud, darkened sometimes by the swift wing of some great bird, screaming to its mates, as it flew northwards, that once more the bleak days were finished and the bloom of spring was on its way. Ponies, haggard and shaggy as bears, crept forth from beneath the shelter of the tors to feed as though famished upon sparse blades of sweet, young, tender grass. The smaller birds, all humped and fluffy from long roosting and shivering in the thickest bushes, now shook their feathers, bathed in pools, and darted off on secret amorous errands of their own. Soon there would be much squabbling over twigs, and filching of horsehair, and busy, cunning weaving of warm, leaf-brown hidden nests. The beech-trees near the village, that had been for many months drenched iron-dark by the rains of winter, now showed themselves naked still, but with smooth boles of burnished silver ; and soon copper buds would clothe their branches in a russet mantle admirably adapted to the squirrels who made their home there, and whose tawny fur was barely distinguishable from the golden-brown of the new-born foliage.

St. Valentine's Day dawned fresh and wild and windy, with gay gleams of bright, elusive sunshine. The sky was a grey-green ocean, and the scudding clouds like frothy breakers. All over the land, lovers were thinking of one another with a tender sentimentality that found expression in the dispatch of flimsy lace-edged cards, scented, satin-lined, wreathed with sprays of silk or silver forget-me-nots, inscribed in gilt with pretty sugary platitudes. A thousand

young misses rose betimes to wait, pink-cheeked, at the doors through which must soon be slipped these perfumed missives so ravishingly expressive of a secret, tongue-tied devotion.

Harry, devoured by his restless passion for his brother's wife, could no more have thought of sending her a painted card than he could have imagined himself climbing up into the sky to wrest away the moon for his love-gift. At times he loved her to distraction, at others he almost hated her. Nor, at its most exalted moments, was his love one which would have found pleasure or consolation in the exchange of notes or flowers or any other sentimental tokens. Fostered secretly, in all the darkness of a lonely and wilful nature, this violent need for her had grown like a weed, only to be half suppressed by the pride that raged because she would not come to him for good and all. That she should so persistently deny herself, after seeking him at Pinetree, seemed to him monstrous, bewildering, utterly incomprehensible. In his morals, or his lack of morals, he was simpler than a savage. She had ceased to love Evelyn, since she loved him, and now that she was to bear his child, it was utterly horrible that she should stay away. Parsons, he realised vaguely, taught that such things were wrong—Mr. O'Shea, he knew, would have been exceedingly shocked to learn of their evening together at Pinetree. But he had lived so much alone out on the moor, away from human beings, that perhaps his resemblance to a faun lay deeper even than Camila supposed. No one had ever taught him to control his appetites; before everything had been changed by Camila's return, he had never given such matters a moment's thought. Nor had Camila herself, before her disappearance, been anything more to him than a source of irritation.


He remembered vividly the day she came back to Colerreddy. She had, he recalled, knocked on the window until Prudence let her in; she had faced them all, shameless and at bay, in a torn brown dress all garlanded with red

berries. Yet she had been veiled in the night-black of her hair, and he had stared, as though dazed, at her strong beautiful legs, bare and amber-brown, and had even noticed the new husky note in her voice, which showed her to be tired and hungry. In one moment, as he watched her, she had become an object of intense desire, and then, he recollected, the much-despised Evelyn, bold where he was shy and awkward, had caught her in his arms and kissed her mouth. Remembering her childish devotion to his brother, he had turned away and left them together. Later, when he saw her once more in her ordinary clothes, he had at first imagined that his strange new want of her was finished, since so much of her lithe wildness had disappeared. All too soon he had realised his mistake ; but by that time she was betrothed to Evelyn. He supposed that he had been very stupid in the matter, but no self-condemnation or, for the matter of that, condemnation of Camila, served to help him in his moods of loneliness.

“ I’d treat her well, too, if she came,” he told himself when he was feeling less hostile towards her : “ I’d give her her head and let her have her own way, so long as she didn’t interfere with my business.”

When, however, he raged against her for her stubbornness, as he often did, he felt that she deserved to be beaten. He had come to this conclusion many times during the morning of St. Valentine’s Day, upon which pleasant festival, for some reason or other, he had felt especially moody. Evelyn, too, was late, and this indifference and unpunctuality always annoyed him.

Soon, however, a village boy arrived with a message. Evelyn was staying down at Colerreddy—Mrs. Lovell’s time had come.



CHAPTER XLIX

Harry received the news in silence. He even picked up his gun and went about the fields looking for rabbits. After missing one, he found himself quite unable to concentrate upon anything save the vague knowledge, acquired in the kitchen during childhood, that women in labour suffered terrible pain. And all the morning he had himself wanted to hurt Camila. He recollected, with a startled horror, the loud whispers in which Lily Betts had been wont to regale Prudence with intimate gossip of travail in the village. "The horse-doctor . . . always too late . . . her screams was terrible, worse'n a scritch-owl . . . and drunk, too, when he does see fit to come. . . ." He thought of his animals, of the ewes that he had tended, of his cows, of his black mare that had slipped her foal and cost him a packet of money all for nothing. But all the time his brain was busy with speculation as to Camila's plight. It was not, indeed, for some time, such was his agitation, that he began to recollect, with a fresh pang, that the child was not Evelyn's, but his own. She was suffering for him, because of him. Evelyn had nothing whatsoever to do with this frightful affair. It had never before occurred to him that he would feel any particular interest in this baby when it was born, since it was, through Camila's obstinacy, to masquerade as the property of Evelyn. Therefore he had given little enough thought to its birth, imagining that Evelyn would one morning stroll into Pinetree and tell him casually, when everything was over and done with and he need feel no alarm, that the infant had good-naturedly appeared at Colerreddy during the night.

That he should now be left seated upon a tree-stump, in

a state of anguished anxiety that must endure until the next morning, seemed to him a cruel and insupportable burden. Nevertheless, he remained seated there for some time, until several rabbits, more courageous than their fellows, slid from their burrows to pose a few yards from him in that attitude favoured by supplicating dogs, regarding him the while with bright, black, unwinking eyes.

At length, coming to a decision, he rose to his feet with a stern air, while the rabbits immediately scattered in a frenzy of terror. Returning to the farm, he gave various orders to his hands and then proceeded to saddle his swiftest pony. In a few moments he was on his way to Colerreddy. Leading it to the stables, he observed with relief a strange animal standing in the nearest stall, a dun cob belonging, not to the horse-doctor, but to the individual who, living out at Drizzle Combe, described himself as surgeon.

He found the front-door ajar, and, walking in, was struck by the solemn, lonely silence of the house. Perhaps it was better so ; if he heard Camila groan, he thought that he must lose his senses. He found his way into Richard's study, which was empty. Here he sat for a little while and thought once more of his child, his own detestable child, perhaps at this very moment in process of being wrenched from Camila's flesh. Then it occurred to him, and the thought gave him comfort, that this business had already happened to her once before and that she had survived it, although brutally used. How strange, he thought, that no one but himself had heard this secret. Perhaps the surgeon . . . ? But he knew the surgeon for a little dried-up man who kept his mouth shut.

Fidgeting, he went to seek a drink in Richard's secret store, and having poured it down his throat, he felt better. He remembered then the tale Camila had told to him of how the dead baby had haunted her, and almost smiled to think that she, who was so strong and brave, should also be so fanciful. Yet he himself had still a sneaking belief in

the Elf King, and in werewolves, and in the Hidden People, and in other superstitions of the moor. And she was a gypsy. Gypsies had strange gifts. And they had all seen the Wild Swan, that ghostly bird of faery legend. Perhaps her story was not so fantastic as he had at first supposed. He shuddered, and poured himself another drink.

Soon, however, he began once more to think of Camila, and he thought of her without enmity now, but as his love, his dear love, who was in travail. The silence of the house became awesome, sinister. Perhaps she had died. He wiped the sweat off his face.

In about twenty minutes, or twenty hours, or twenty years, the silence was broken by the sound of measured footsteps on the stairs outside.

He waited for a moment, suddenly cunning, intensely desirous of concealing his emotion, then, his hands in pockets, sauntered out into the hall. Here he encountered Evelyn.

For a second they stared at one another. Evelyn was white, and his fair locks ruffled ; he appeared surprised to see Harry, who looked to him grim and surly.

" Well, Harry. What may you be doing about the house ? "

" I got your message and came to enquire, having business in the village. "

" Very civil, " Evelyn approved.

" How are matters ? Is she very sick ? "

" My dear Harry, you must congratulate me. "

" Indeed ? "

" Yes. I am the father of a fine son. The ugliest mommet you ever did see. "

" A son, is it ? "

Evelyn sat down on the lowest step of the staircase as though he were too weary to converse unless he rested his head upon his hands.

" It's two hours old, " he said at length. " The surgeon is drinking with Papa in the dining-room. I've had the task

of keeping our mother from Camila. She's in a fine rage, and boxed my ears."

"And Camila?"

"Oh, Camila . . ." he paused, and then blurted out :

"Harry, these women—I shall never understand them. God knows of what stuff they're fashioned. Since early to-day she's writhed in pain, such terrible pain that I could not bear to be with her."

Harry said nothing.

Evelyn continued :

"I saw her just now, and she sat up in her bed and called for the child. When Prudence brought it to her, she laughed and held it close and looked at me with that sidelong glance of hers, as though in triumph, and seemed strong enough, I thought, to leap about the fells. There was colour in her cheeks then, and she had no memory of the pain she'd suffered, being too much occupied with the brat. I spoke to her, and she uttered one strange word, some word, I suppose, of her own tongue."

"What word?"

"*Flamenco*. What does it mean, *flamenco*? It sounded outlandish to me and wild, but she spoke it very clearly. And then she seemed put out, so I left her. But to forget such pain! Is she as other women are, or is she, perhaps, what Papa calls witchen?"

"I believe," Harry said gruffly, "that they are always thus."

"It seems incredible! And the surgeon, whom I fetched this morning, thinks her a marvel."

Harry was silent.

He reflected, with some annoyance, that he had endured a torment of anxiety all for nothing. She had suffered, certainly, as was the lot of all women, but she had already, it seemed, forgotten her pain. She had been all aglow with joy, nursing her child, flushed with delight and happiness, crooning to it in her own outlandish tongue, while he sat solitary and white and sick in the lonely study, cursing

himself for the suffering that he had brought her, the suffering that she had borne with such resignation, such endurance, and such complete indifference.

And Evelyn, watching him like a bright precocious child, imagined himself to be a father ! That, he thought, was almost too good a joke to be true. Then he remembered his last interview with her in the hall where he now stood talking to his brother, that interview in which she had told him very plainly that their great love for one another was ended irrevocably, since she was to bear a child that must be brought up decently at Colerreddy, not left to run wild up at Pinetree with such a ruffianly unlawful father as himself.

"Christ !" he said inwardly, feeling that his obsession for her, so fearful in its intensity, must soon take control of him and cause him to commit upon his brother some awful act of violence. And then, aloud :

"Evelyn, will you sell me your share of the farm ? I've made some money—I can pay you, I think, in a few years."

"I would be delighted," Evelyn told him pleasantly, "but I imagine we had better wait until Papa—until Papa takes less interest in our affairs."

And he smiled, much pleased by the way things were shaping. This smile, so swift and elfin and inhuman, made Harry realise more clearly than ever before to what a strange, cold, unfeeling creature Camila had bound herself. She and the child—his child—a pretty future she had fashioned for the pair of them ! He tried once more to hate her, succeeded for a moment, and then became utterly confused. He wanted her, he thought, more than ever, yet no longer had he any pity, only a furious desire to keep her, if necessary against her will, a prisoner. Yet in that he knew that he would never succeed, for she was as strong, if not stronger than he. She had said that she would dash herself from his windows rather than remain with him against her will ; grudgingly, sulkily, he found himself believing her. Gypsies, he knew, committed crazy acts when they conceived their liberty to be threatened ; yet, at that moment,

he would have enjoyed the taming of her, for she had brought him much unhappiness in exchange for a few brief hours of pleasure. Once more his pride, that was as much a barrier between them as was hers, set him aflame with cruel and violent longings for revenge. He thought, desolate :

"I'll get some woman to come with me to Pinetree. She'll be furious, and I less lonely. That'll teach her. Some woman—any woman. What do I care ? "

"You look unwell, Harry," Evelyn remarked affably.

"It's this cursed lambing season beginning once more. Soon, in a few days, you will be able to take your turn. I can't do two men's work."

"Whenever you wish," Evelyn told him good-naturedly.

"Good. I'll send for you."

He went towards the door, but Evelyn called him back.

"Come up, and see the brat. It's the most nonsensical doll I ever laid eyes on. And you might soothe Mama, who insists she's being treated like a stranger. She can box your ears this time—mine still smart."

"No. I'm late."

"Oh, late . . . ! Do you think of nothing but manure and farrowing sows ? And the surgeon and Papa must by this time be beneath the table."

"I'm late, I tell you."

And as Evelyn continued to argue, he shut the door in his brother's face.

Riding home, he passed a pedlar's woman near the village. He pulled up, catching beneath her hood a glimpse of dark, shrewd eyes and weather-beaten face.

"Ride home with me, and eat a bit of supper ! "

But she laughed derisively, almost holding her sides.

"What, me with a man at the Magpie yonder, and four brats clamouring for their mammy ? Fie on you, sir, when there's a plenty hungry doxies prowling the moor this very night ! "

"Then go to the devil," Harry told her, and passed on swiftly towards the lighted windows of Pinetree.

CHAPTER L

For Camila the next few days passed swiftly—too swiftly—for already she was strong and well, and this strange sweet feeling of peace, the like of which she had never before experienced, seemed to her a happiness so evasive, so delicate, so ephemeral, that the slightest contact with the world outside must shatter it irrevocably. The first disagreement with Evelyn, some cynical unbalanced tirade from Harriet, these would suffice to tear her away for ever from that world of quiet content where she lay serene and tranquil, enclosed with her child behind the merciful barriers that had sprung up like magic to protect her.

For the miracle of birth never ceased to cause her astonishment and delight. She often stared at the child, so tiny and so pale, smaller than a doll, with a fluff of dark hair and fists no larger than butterflies, that already beat the air in rage or joy or pain, and could scarcely believe that she was not imagining its existence. A few days ago it had not been there nor in the world at all ; now, incredibly, it lay in a white shawl beside her, and yawned, or whimpered, or was attacked by hiccoughs, as the mood seized it. Often she talked to it, as though it could already understand her, and at times, after she had slept, awoke with a pang of terror lest this small mysterious creature should have vanished in the night.

Of Harry she seldom thought in this new mood of tranquillity. Nor did she ever connect him very seriously with the child, which now seemed to her, since its birth, her own, utterly and completely her possession. Evelyn, of course, when he played at father, was merely ridiculous and aroused in her an immense feeling of superiority, and

Harry had receded, a dark, vague figure, into the background of her thoughts. But the baby was hers and nothing to do with either of them. So she argued, and it seemed as though the night of the thunderstorm, the night spent up at Pinetree, had been forever blotted from her mind.

On the tenth day she felt strong enough to realise, unwillingly enough, that she must get up and go about her business. The happy, peaceful days were finished ; no longer might she lie abed alone with her son and keep him to herself, as she had loved to do ; in future she must share him with the whole pack of them, with Evelyn and Richard and Harriet and Prudence and Mr. O'Shea. It was amusing to wear her old gowns once more and see how slim she was ; at once she seemed to have recovered all her swift suppleness of movement, her soft and gracious youthful lines. Really, she decided, scanning her profile in the glass, it was not so terrible, this ordeal, as she had at first imagined ; if you set your teeth and tried not to scream for a few hours, matters settled themselves, and indeed she had suffered more, far more, when she had been with Brazil.

The memory of the child that had died in Cornwall, always hazy, had now become for her dimmer than a long-forgotten dream. She was now no longer afraid to sleep alone. Small and defenceless, her living child yet had power to drive away from her the little angry ghost that had for so many months sobbed outside her window. How happy she was ! And so she came with her baby downstairs to the drawing-room, where a peat-fire burned and Great-Aunt Adelaide smiled down upon them from her picture. Here, of course, came Harriet, and since Harriet had from the first disliked extremely the idea of being a grandmother, the hostility between them, for some time dormant, broke out once more to show Camila very plainly that the last ten days had been a pleasant interlude in an existence that must, it seemed, be for ever fraught with bitterness and conflict.

Richard, too, seemed sickly, yet refused to see the surgeon.

He had, indeed, no great opinion of this person, whom he had apparently made so drunk after the confinement that the fellow had subsequently fallen off his pony and slept all night beneath a gorse-bush, quite unconscious of an amputation and two more maternity cases anxiously awaiting him down at Drizzle Combe.

"As soon," said Richard, "would I call in the Wise Woman from the village."

"Why not?" Camila asked him.

"Why not? Because I'm past the time of life to derive enjoyment from being tickled by witchwomen. I'll leave all that to lads."

"You should be bled, Papa," Evelyn suggested cheerfully.

"And don't meddle in my affairs, either of you. Since this brat appeared, you both imagine yourselves competent to give your elders advice on all subjects, especially those—and there are plenty—upon which you are most ignorant."

They said no more, although Evelyn winked at Camila. Then came Mr. O'Shea, eager to admire the baby. He was so obviously delighted by the child, so kind and beaming and benevolent, that suddenly it occurred to her how appalled he would have been to learn that Harry, not Evelyn, was its father. Suddenly she felt vindictive towards her lover. Evelyn was speaking:

"You'll baptise him, of course, sir? And we must choose godparents . . . a simple task—my father, Harry, and possibly Celia, for whom Prudence can stand proxy."

This was too much.

"Not Harry!" she objected sharply.

They stared at her in astonishment. She repeated, holding the child close against her breast:

"Not Harry, I implore you! Why not Lance Neville? Why not Evelyn's friend, Mr. Abels? But Harry—oh, please don't choose Harry!"

"Oh, don't interfere!" Evelyn told her impatiently.

And Mr. O'Shea, adjusting his spectacles, objected mildly :

" I had thought these childish feuds all finished and done with, Camila. Harry's a fine lad, industrious, hard-working, and the child's uncle into the bargain. Why so contemptuous ? "

" I don't know. One can't explain these things. But I would prefer someone else, and surely I may have some say in the matter ? "

" Don't make difficulties and interrupt when we are talking," Evelyn admonished with a frown.

" Come, Evelyn," urged Mr. O'Shea, anxious at all costs to maintain peace, " surely the three of us can settle this matter without disagreement ? And don't be so high-handed, my boy ; after all, Camila is the baby's mother."

" Well, I'm its father."

She was silent, but bit her lip. At that moment she thought it would have been impossible to declare which of the brothers she most disliked.

" And why this aversion to poor Harry ? " pursued Mr. O'Shea, genuinely disturbed at the prospect of any aspersion being cast upon his favourite.

" It's not aversion."

" Then why——" Evelyn began.

" Oh, do stop tormenting me with questions ! It's a fancy, that's all, but have it your own way. Anything is better than argument."

An awkward silence followed. The parson, embarrassed, gazed down at the baby's dusky head, cradled against Camila's breast, then caught the dark defiance of her face, the cold anger of her long, strange eyes. He wondered then, as he had wondered many times, what had happened during that mysterious twelvemonth spent roving with the gypsies to change her from the frank warm-hearted child he once had known so well into this strong-willed, reserved, and moody woman ? And she was, he remembered, not yet nineteen—a girl still. As for Evelyn, the boy seemed irritable and displeased. He said, to break the silence :

"The child favours your colouring, Camila. He has none of his father's fairness. As a little boy, Evelyn, although a limb of mischief, resembled nothing so much as the famous angel-heads of Joshua Reynolds."

"Indeed?" Evelyn was pleased.

Camila smiled.

"You remember him, of course?" Mr. O'Shea enquired of her.

"Oh, yes. But I'm glad my son is dark."

And she smiled again.

"The godparents are agreed then," Evelyn informed her frigidly, "my father, Harry, and Celia."

If he expected an outburst, he was disappointed. She merely inclined her head in silence.

When the parson had gone, they at once began to argue. Evelyn accused her of making a fool of him before their one outside acquaintance.

"You're glad our son's so dark, are you? You're glad he doesn't favour his father? You might at least keep your opinions to yourself, not air them before O'Shea."

"Oh, don't shout at me, Evelyn. You'll wake the child."

"How came you, then, to marry me, since you find my appearance so displeasing?"

"Are you a child? You talk as though you were even younger than this baby?"

"Will you answer my question?"


"Certainly I'll answer it," and she rose to her feet, pushing her hair from her face. "You ask me if I find your looks displeasing, or some such rubbish. Well, I don't. On the contrary, I think you a pretty creature, a very pretty creature indeed. Does that content you?"

As he began to explain very loudly and volubly that it did not, and that he considered the adjective "pretty," as applied to himself, nothing less than an insult, the baby awoke and began to cry.

"There, look what you've done!"

Exasperated, he hastened from the room. Left alone with her son, she was once more at peace. Her contempt for Evelyn, her perverse anger against Harry, these vanished from her heart like a devil cast out by priests or like the last snows left drifting on the moor to dissolve in the light of spring. If only they would leave her alone more often ! If only Evelyn would go to London again ! If only Harry would perceive the irony of acting as godparent to his own child ! She walked up and down the room, soothing the bundle in her arms, talking to it softly, until at last it fell asleep once more and sucked its thumb.

She sat down on the window-seat to gaze enraptured upon this spectacle. Her mother before her had been seized with this same violent worship for her new-born children, seized also with the same primitive craving for solitude, the same desire to secrete herself, to love her baby alone, where curious eyes might not pry upon them. Her mother had possessed, after Camila's birth, the vast pine-forests of the Basque country in which to disappear and indulge in this gypsy idolatry of her child. Less fortunate, the daughter had only a house in which to defend herself from those who loved to come and stare at them and make absurd remarks ; later, of course there would be the moor, but now they must be shut within four walls, she and the baby, and already Colerreddy had become irksome.



CHAPTER LI

After some argument on all sides, the child was eventually christened Robert Richard. The baptismal ceremony was as brief, as simple, and as free from formality as had been the wedding of Evelyn and Camila. The complete decorum with which the infant comported itself throughout the service delighted its mother, who not unnaturally imagined that, since it lay passive, there must be little enough devil within to survive so peaceably this casting-out by holy water.

Yet the christening was not without incident for Camila, since at the last moment Harry appeared, spruce and almost handsome in his Sunday suit. He advanced towards the font in a leisurely manner, his dark hair agleam with oil, his face grave and composed, seeming to find nothing incongruous in thus standing sponsor to his son.

She averted her eyes, determined at all costs to curb those emotions which, for many months dormant, now, at the mere sight of him, leapt suddenly into tempestuous being.

The baptism proceeded.

Just before the end of the service, as the small congregation rose to its feet, their eyes met suddenly for one moment across the font. It seemed to both that the clash of this dark, swift, sweeping glance must expose the pair of them as surely as though they had cried aloud there in the church their violent need for one another. For they knew, now that they met for the first time since the birth of their child, that in spite of pride and anger, this mutual need was, if possible, greater than it had been before. Both had attempted to hate, and both had failed. Their love, their

stormy and imperious love for one another, was too strong, too overmastering, not to have survived triumphant their moments of resentment at Camila's weakness or her strength. They would always try to hate, these two, mutually distrustful of this lawless bond that held them thus enchained to one another, but they would always fail, unable for long to deny their imperishable desire for one another.

"Come to me," he urged, while the voice of Mr. O'Shea droned pleasantly in their ears. Her head demurely bent over a borrowed prayer-book, she told him "never." But she felt weak, defenceless, until she thought of her son; her son, who must at all costs have the best she could give him.

The baptism was over; they filed out of the church. For one moment he was near to her; he whispered teasingly:

"He favours his father, doesn't he, my angel?"

But she made no reply; she was still dazed by the effort of having thrust him for ever from her life. It was not until she took her child from Prudence that she ceased to tremble. It was strange, she thought, that a being so weak and tiny as this baby could give her strength.

Harry refused, pleading business, to return to Colerreddy and drink the health of the small Robert, but rode away to Pinetree without another word. When he had gone, she felt less agitated. She was glad that he stayed away for many weeks.

At the end of March, when the weather was warmer, she was able to satisfy her love of taking the child out on to the moor. Here, quite alone with him, she was happy, and would, she knew, be happier, since in April Evelyn was to leave for London. Beneath the shelter of Monk's Tor she spread a rug for her baby and there let him lie, uttering strange, gurgling sounds, while she sat beside him cross-legged, content to watch him hour after hour. He was already known as Robin to all at Colerreddy, and often, when she thought he gazed at her as though he knew her,

she addressed him by this name as though he could already recognise it and reply to her. Out there, in the freshness of wind and sunshine, she nursed him, convinced that he would grow up stronger than if he spent much time in houses. Sometimes she sang to him, and although she did not realise it, her songs were gypsy songs.

For Robin was to grow up a gentleman, all unconscious of the nomad blood in his veins—about that she had made up her mind immediately after her conversation with Richard. Never would he learn from her the ways of *flamenco* people. For him the laws of *leis prala*, of the Romany tribes, so bitterly interpreted to her through the medium of Brazil, must for ever remain a mystery. Latin and Greek, yes. Those were right and proper. But the speech of the Roman people, never. Nor would she ever talk to him of the road, but of hunting, shooting, and books. He would lose, she thought, much that was beautiful—the blaze of stars sprinkled thick across the sky, the harvest-moon, a great monster of solid gold, casting a ruddy twilight that caused even the darkness to glow ; the crisp, sunny freshness of summer dawns made vivid by the joyous shouting of many birds ; the dense, curling turquoise smoke of twig-fires heaped haphazard by ditches, and the savoury smell of frying bacon ; blossoming thorn-trees dazzling all the hedge-rows like snowy brides ; the springy couch of heather and the changing moods of the moor ; the pounding rattle of wheels, the barking of wild dogs, the cold sweeping purity of the wind at early morning, the black sweet mystery of nights spent stretched beneath the sky.

These he would miss, and for a moment she pitied him, until she thought of lashing bitter rain, of sleet that bit like the teeth of wolves, of empty bellies, and of bodies stiff and numb with weariness—of short winter days spent huddling all ashiver in the damp, of blistered feet, and of the road, the accursed, damnable seductive road that had no end, that sooner or later maimed and killed all those whom it had once enslaved.

No, Robin should know nothing of gypsies. Perhaps a tutor, and later on, if they could afford it, the fine school of which Richard had spoken, the school where he would study many things of which she knew nothing and at which he would meet young men of breeding, who would ask him to spend his holidays with them in stately houses, where he would be waited upon by footmen with powdered hair, and shoot pheasants and perhaps drive a coach-and-four with a long cigar in his mouth.

"Oh, Robin," she whispered, lapsing unconsciously into the gypsies' tongue, "*mande cams tute*—how much I love you !"

It disconcerted her to remember that when they had first shown her son to her, she had whispered, on seeing his dark fluffy head, the word "*flamenco*." Why ? She did not know. But never, never, should he hear that word again.

In May calamity fell upon Colerreddy. One morning Prudence, the prop and mainstay of the household, was found dead. Her heart, they said, had failed, and for some time it seemed as though Harriet's reason, for some years dimmed and weakening, would fail also. Then, when everyone was in despair, she took a strange and sudden fancy to Camila's baby, and was saved. Ravaged, haggard, and unclean, she bent like some bedizened sorceress over Robin's cot and laughed aloud to watch his comical grimaces when she jingled in his face her wealth of rings and bracelets.

So she forgot, but Colerreddy seemed strange, even lonely, without the honest, sharp-tongued old woman, with her dark stuff dress, her keys, and her fierce undemonstrative devotion to her crazy, painted mistress.


Nor could Harriet be left alone. Richard at length found in Princetown a highly superior young woman, daughter of a chapel preacher, who confessed herself delighted at the prospect of acting as maid, nurse, and companion to the poor invalid lady of Colerreddy. And so Miss Janet Williams arrived in a neat grey gown and black bonnet ; well-developed, plump as a wood-pigeon, round-faced,

fresh-skinned, with serious hazel eyes and braids of tidy light brown hair.

"She's too genteel," Camila remarked to Evelyn, "she'll never bide with us. The first time your mother swears, or is tipsy, and hey presto ! that black bonnet will be put on once more for the last time."

But Camila was mistaken.

No one, save Miss Janet Williams herself, realised quite how shattering were the shocks she received during her first week at Colereddy ; but, being a strong-willed young woman, she conceived that it was her duty to remain by Harriet, and, setting her teeth, she made up her mind that stay she would. Yet sometimes she felt that she was living in a nightmare from which there could be no possible awakening. For the first time since Mr. O'Shea's initial visit to Richard, the Colereddy household was dispassionately scrutinised by the eye of an outsider, to be condemned as strange, fantastic, eccentric beyond belief.



CHAPTER LII

The house itself was bad enough, reflected young Miss Williams in desperation ; so damp, so dusty, so filled with gloom, so wildly situated. The family declared it to be haunted and conceived this to be a good jest ; but although she herself was stoutly incredulous of the supernatural, there was no doubt that at night the passages creaked with soft, padding footsteps that could scarcely be those of rats. The contrast, too, between the luxurious drawing-room, so pretentious and genteel, that yet had dust lying thick upon the furniture, and the kitchen, so squalid and dirty and yet so wasteful where food was concerned, most gravely disturbed this mild puritan soul. The house was damp, too, and bitterly cold in winter, and even the portraits of the Lovell ancestors stared down upon her mockingly or menacingly, or with a cold slyness that disconcerted her. There was not, she thought, a single godly face among them.

But the house was nothing, compared with the family. Mrs. Lovell, her own particular charge, was a drunkard, and although it was her duty to see that spirits were not consumed on the sly, Mr. Lovell had ordained that a certain amount of alcohol must be allowed his wife, to keep her, so he said, in peace. Even without her drinking, Mrs. Lovell was eccentric almost to the point of insanity. Her appearance, for instance, was grotesque ; so gaunt and wolfish was she, so strangely dressed in the soiled satin gowns, the nodding plumes, the tinsel turbans of another period. And how moody she was ; cursing her husband one moment and laughing at her parrot the next, and so improper in her conversation, so fond of relating, with many a wink and

nudge, anecdotes of the type which Janet had always been brought up to understand were described by the pious as bawdy !

And Mr. Lovell, of course, had no control over her. Perhaps, thought Janet, he drank himself, and certainly he seemed unhealthy, with his big paunch, and his great pasty face, and his way of bursting into violent, short-lived rages, finding expression in the most shocking profanity, which made her feel hot all over, as though she were stripped of all her clothes. At first she put her fingers in her ears when Mrs. Lovell told indecent stories or Mr. Lovell swore ; but this seemed only to irritate them further, and so she must pretend to listen, although she made her mind a blank, and sometimes even tried to pray. After the first few days she was no longer afraid of Harriet, only pitiful, and rather disgusted ; but Richard, with his blustering, continued to alarm her.

Then there were the young couple. Mr. Evelyn, more beautiful than an angel in this den of darkness, at first seemed to her the one sane and gentle inhabitant of Cole-reddy. He looked, she thought, like some young saint. Then it began gradually to dawn on her that he was no better than the others ; quarrelling with his father, laughing at his mother, raging at the servants, and shouting abuse at his wife. She observed, too, that when he was angry, the pure, almost sexless and ethereal beauty of his expression vanished at once, instantly to be replaced by a white, intent, fiendish regard that shocked her, because at such moments he appeared as one possessed by demons. So much, alas ! for her gentle saint.

Then his wife, who was undoubtedly a queer one—so handsome and flashy and foreign-looking, with her wild, long eyes and her careless ways, and her passionate, almost unnatural adoration of her little dark child. Young Mrs. Lovell seemed very defiant, and always ready to flare up ; she had no fear of the other members of the family, no

respect for them ; and whenever they scolded her, as they did very often—and she was indeed disgracefully lazy, save where her baby was concerned—she would either laugh at them, or seem to burn them with her strange eyes, or merely toss her head and take no notice. And more often than not, especially when Mr. Evelyn was away in London, she was out all day upon the moor with her little Robin, a packet of sandwiches in her pocket, and no bonnet, so that the wind blew her hair into the wildest elflocks. She shocked Janet dreadfully by nursing her child with the greatest aplomb and self-possession, wherever they happened to be, and no matter who was in the room—she had no modesty. Sometimes, when she thought herself alone with the baby, she sang to it softly in a foreign tongue. Janet imagined her to be Russian, or Spanish, perhaps, and thought Harriet was rambling when she once referred to her daughter-in-law as “ that gypsy.”

Then there was the elder son, Mr. Harry, who lived away up at the farm and rode down occasionally to visit his father. Janet stood in awe of him ; he was so stern, so swarthy, and so silent, answering only in monosyllables, obviously hostile to his younger brother. Perhaps, she thought innocently, he was jealous of the young couple because they lived at Colerreddy and saw more of his father than he did himself. In any case, she had once been in the dining-room, sewing before the fire, when Mr. Harry came in for a glass of sherry and was interrupted by young Mrs. Lovell, who had lost her shawl and was wandering the house in search of it. They had each one started, as though this sudden encounter were disagreeable to both, and she would never forget to her dying day the dark, evil look that passed between them.

Neither had uttered a single word, since she herself sat stitching nervously between the two of them. Mrs. Lovell, turning her back, calmly insolent, had left the room immediately. Mr. Harry, remaining to finish his sherry, looked sullen enough to turn the milk, and soon afterwards went

away himself, pausing only to bid her a curt good-day on his way to the door.

Yet somehow, to the simple soul of Janet Williams, this little incident stood out more vividly than the more crazy happenings of everyday life at Colerreddy. They had met only for one brief moment, these two, yet that moment was too long, apparently, for either to control the dark flame, that, smouldering in their secret hearts, had blazed forth so suddenly, like a flashing sword, to give this innocent her first revelation of passion at its most naked, stripped of all pity, all sentiment, and all glamour. To the virginal Janet, who saw only their ugliness, divorced from the dragging misery that lay behind, this brief drawing of the veil had been a hideous experience. What, she wondered, had they done to one another in the past, this man and this woman, to hate so bitterly and with such cold, relentless cruelty? That they loved, and that their love was stronger than their hatred, she knew not, nor could be expected to know. Yet, although she was by nature unimaginative, she felt afterwards, as she sat alone in the empty dining-room, that their sombre shapes still moved before her eyes, powerful, remorseless, expressing mutely those things which it is best not to know.

And they seemed to her wilful, wicked, almost devilish, in their concentrated fury of dislike.

After that, even when the wind whistled about the house, and Richard blustered, and Harriet complained, and Evelyn abused his wife and all the world, and she felt homesick, longing for her neat, bare home and for the peace of her plain, familiar chapel, these things fretted her no more, since she had grown used to them; but often she thought, with horror and repugnance, of Harry and Camila and of their dark and bitter look.

Surely, she mused, inherited superstition dominating acquired piety, these two had in the past formed some unholy pact—perhaps sold their souls to Satan? And then, at such moments, all forgetful of her excellent

father, she would bury her head in her pillow and evoke them in her mind, a pretty pair, no doubt employed all night in secret coolly and deliberately ill-wishing each other. Which, she wondered, would conquer in the end?

CHAPTER LIII

“Mr. Evelyn, if you do such a thing again, I shall inform your father.”

“My father? A lot he'd care. And what's a kiss? Do you mean to tell me you have never been kissed before?”

“I want to pass. Please go away.”

Evelyn laughed.

Temporarily disarmed by this laugh, Janet thought, “He can't be as bad as he seems.” But she repeated, her cheeks like pinks, her eyes round with agitation, “Please to let me pass. I've to go to the kitchen on an errand from Mrs. Lovell.”

“Give me a kiss, and then I'll let you go.”

“No!”

This time she was indignant, even alarmed, for his grey eyes were wild and mischievous enough to disturb one who was learning to know the evil ways of his family. She mistrusted, too, the pale cruel look that came to his beautiful face whenever his slightest wish was thwarted. Again, very firmly, she said “No,” and strove to conceal the agitated beating of her heart as best she could.

He laughed again, less pleasantly.

“Very well. I'll persevere no longer. The temptation, my dear, is not so great as you appear to imagine. But tell me, before I go, where in God's name I may find my wife?”

She answered, conscious of two conflicting emotions, intense relief and faint disappointment:

“She was with Mr. Lovell not half-an-hour ago. He is unwell this morning.”

“She's not there now. But never mind.”

And he walked away whistling, without a backward

glance. Indeed, he had forgotten her existence ; and, if he had paused to reflect, it would never have occurred to him that he might kiss her again. She was not attractive to him, but had caught his fancy for one moment, as she came running down the stairs, trim and neat like a Quaker, in her plain grey dress.

"Unlike Camila," he thought vaguely, "that must for ever bedizen herself with ear-drops and gaudy shawls and God knows what."

He was not pleased with his wife, nor had he been for the past year. Certainly, during the last six months, since the birth of Robin, she had been more agreeable, but he still found her unruly, and he was frequently irritated by her sharp tongue. Indeed, during his last visit to London he had been so spoiled by Mrs. Abels that he had begun to resent in Camila any disinclination to obey his slightest wish. Yet he was slightly in awe of her, for he felt that if he tried her too high, she would sooner or later run away to the gypsies, and this would not suit him at all, for she had become a habit. There were moments, too, when he still felt her fascination. But he had become too lazy to search for her whenever she disappeared. Moreover, he was supposed to be painting.

Camila herself was out near the Tor with her baby, and had lain for some time basking half asleep in the rays of a benevolent and amber sun. Robin was naked, save for his vest ; she herself had taken off her shoes and stockings. Both were burnt soft dusky-brown and both were happy, smiling, beautiful, and strong. Harry came upon them entirely by accident, for he was on his way to Drizzle Combe, and, for his peace of mind, would have given much to avoid this meeting. Yet now that he saw them thus together, he rejoiced, for she seemed defenceless, lying there so lazy and serene with her baby, her dark face smiling and at peace, her wild grace, that first had caught him, more seductive, he thought, than it had ever seemed since the first day of her return to Colerreddy.

He stopped, pulling up his pony sharply, and sat silent as a statue, regarding the group before him. Then, of course, she must needs catch sight of him and fly into a rage, declaring that he had come to spy upon her, and that he might take himself off as speedily as possible.

He took no notice, but approached them, sliding from his pony.

"I had no idea you were here. I have other matters to think of, you know, Camila."

"You should be harvesting."

"Not to-day. I'm on my way to Drizzle Combe to see a heifer."

"Then go away."

"I'm damned if I will. Now, at last, I may look at my son."

"Leave him alone. Don't you touch him. And don't call him yours, because I hate it."

He ignored her, but strolled towards the rug and bent over the child, while she watched him angrily, ready at a second's notice to pounce upon Robin and bear him away.

"He favours me, as I said before," Harry remarked seriously, "and he's black-haired, too, as one would expect from your child, whoever the father."

He looked across at her, and his face was no longer hard, but grave and quiet, as though impressed, despite himself, by this living creature that they had both of them fashioned during their one hour of happiness together.

"How strange!" he continued, as she did not answer. "It seems so long, as though an eternity had passed, since you came to visit me at Pinetree."

"It is long. And an eternity *has* passed."

"I can endure it during the daytime," he told her suddenly, looking away to the hollow wherein lay Drizzle Combe, "because I'm working hard, and have no thoughts but for my crops and my cattle. It's when the darkness begins to come that I miss you. When I'm eating my tea of

a winter night before the fire and the wind gets up. It's at such times that I want you most."

She sat silent, her face turned away, picking at a sprig of white heather that she had gathered for luck and meant to pin to Robin's dress.

He blurted out, after a pause :

"Are you *never* coming, Camilla ? You and the brat ? "

She shook her head vehemently, afraid of speaking.

"Do you like your child more than you like me ? "

"I don't know," she told him in a low tone of voice.

"In some ways I think I do. At least he has given me peace, and that you could never do, not if we lived together all our lives. He can't torment me, and you bring me only happiness and pain together. And for a long time the pain has been greater than the happiness."

"That's because you won't come to me."

She was silent.

He went on, his brown eyes slanting with triumph and malice :

"We'll see what peace you get from him when he grows up a proper Egyptian and leaves you for the first pretty Romany girl he meets."

"Yes, that's what he'd do if we brought him up at Pine-tree. A creditable pair of parents we'd make ! No, Robin's going to be a gentleman and go to a fine school. He shall never learn Egyptian ways."

"You're beautiful, Camila, when your face lights up like a candle and you speak so grandly, like a queen. Yet at the same time you're ridiculous. What can Evelyn give the child that I cannot ? "

"I'll tell you. It's very simple. A lawful name, to begin with. Secondly, money."

"Money ? "

"Yes. He always seems rich. I think he must sell many pictures when he goes to London."

"I'm the elder. Coleruddy will belong to me one day. Then, if I please, I can turn both you and Evelyn from my

door and send you up to Pinetree, or to London, perhaps, and then we'll see how rich he is, your famous Evelyn."

"London?" her heart seemed to contract. "Do you really mean that you'd let me go away from you for ever?"

"Are we together now?"

She began to cry.

He watched her for some moments in silence. Then—for, however much he wished it, he could not for long be cruel to her—he said in a gentler voice:

"I was teasing, Camila. I'll never let you go, if you want to stay. Either at Colerreddy or at Pinetree."

"Yes," she sobbed, "but Evelyn? Suppose one day he wants us to live in London?"

"Then you'd leave him and come to me. It might be a solution of your problem."

"I can't, I tell you, with Robin. How stupid you are! Why won't you understand?"

"Very well, then, listen. Evelyn, you know, wants me to buy his share of the farm. That I'll only do on one condition—that he makes his home at Colerreddy, or, when my parents die, in the neighbourhood. We'll have it in black and white, otherwise I'll not buy. I've got him under my hand."

"But what reason can you give? He knows you don't like him."

"I'll give no reason to him for any of my actions. He'll do as I tell him, or no more trips to London. And, mind you, he's not rich, but poor as a church-mouse. He may get a few guineas here and there for his damned pictures, but that, unless he's found some woman with money, is the beginning and end of the matter. So you're safe."

She said quietly:

"You are very good to me, Harry. And this means so much. I couldn't go as far away from you as London. Here, although we seldom see one another, every stone, every

tree, every tuft of grass or heather, means you, because this is your home. I could never leave while you were here. Never, never, not even if I were not to see you again for ten years."

"Don't fret yourself," he told her, "I'll wear you down one day for all you're so prideful. My mind's made up, Camila, and already, down at the village, young as I am, they say how hard I am to cross."

She gathered the baby into her arms and scrambled to her feet, facing him.

"Good-bye. I must take him home."

"Wait a bit—I haven't finished with you. You shall at least give me a kiss before you go."

"No, I can't do that. If you kiss me now, you'll destroy the happiness of our meeting this morning, for I'll be unhappier, much unhappier, when you're gone."

"Well, *I* shan't," and he seized her arm.

"Oh, Harry, can't you see that even being with you in front of other people makes me quite distracted? I try to forget you and I cannot—you make it utterly impossible."

Yet, as usual, he had only to come near her to overwhelm at once her powers of resistance ; while he teased her, half mischievous, half angry, the baby's brown eyes gazed up wisely at their flushed and sunburnt faces.

"Oh, go away," she said, "you'll make me drop him. Leave me alone for God's sake, Harry, unless you wish me to hate you for the rest of my life."

"Then go to London !" he mocked, kissing her quite composedly, one arm about her shoulders. Then, for her hearing was more acute than his, a new note of alarm came into her voice.

"Go away, quick ! There's someone coming."

He released her exactly one second before the head of Janet Williams appeared around the Tor. Janet was running, her cheeks bright pink, her deep bosom heaving—for she was but little accustomed to violent exertion—her

smooth light hair blown and ruffled by the soft summer wind.

“There !” muttered Camila.

“Spying, is she ?”

“I don’t know—or care. There will never be anything more to spy upon.”

CHAPTER LIV

The sight of her witch and warlock conversing quite amicably beneath the Tor took Janet's breath away. How could such things be, after what she had seen in the dining-room? And there was Mrs. Lovell barefooted, hugging her baby, her black locks tumbled, her cheeks slashed with a bright flame of colour, her great eyes ablaze, so wild and heathenish and defiant, as she stood erect in the bright and brilliant sunshine! Mr. Harry, too, was sullen no longer, but looked—how was it possible?—gaily wicked, mischievously mocking and insolent. Yet, even in this strange new mood of high spirits and hilarity they still seemed to her sinister, like the Unholy Ones, of whom she had heard tell, who laughed gleefully at the debaucheries of a Witches' Covent. How could they hate at one moment and laugh so carelessly the next? Forgetting her errand, she ceased to run and cautiously approached them, her eyes downcast, her mouth prim. Such timidity of bearing, so incomprehensible to their natures, impressed them both unfavourably. They were so accustomed to abuse, anger, suspicion, hatred, that shyness and delicacy, of which they knew nothing, aroused in both an aggressive reserve not far removed from frank hostility.

Camila addressed Janet in a silken voice :

“ Did you want me, Janet ? ”

Janet, trying not to pant, doing her best to believe that she addressed a mortal woman like herself, answered nervously :

“ Yes, Mrs. Lovell, and Mr. Harry, too. Mr. Lovell has been taken ill, and Mr. Evelyn has ridden post-haste for the surgeon. There's no one in the house, and I wondered——”

They were silent. Although they made no movement it seemed as though a secret, darting look passed between them. Then, and then only, Janet realised that they were in perfect accord. Their hate had vanished—she saw well enough how intimate they were. Camila turned to Harry.

“Go back quickly, on your pony. I’ll follow with the child. But hurry.”

He nodded. Without another word, he approached his pony, grazing contentedly near by, and swung himself into the saddle. He vanished as they gazed after him.

“Shall I carry Robin?” Janet asked.

“No, thank you. I can manage. But don’t let’s waste any time.”

“Your shoes and stockings——?”

“Oh, they can wait. I’m accustomed to walking bare-foot. But tell me, please, what’s wrong with Mr. Lovell?”

They were already on the homeward path. Janet began to pant once more. It was difficult to keep pace with this strange woman, burdened as she was with her heavy child and her bare feet, which only seemed to make her swifter. She replied at length, gasping for breath:

“Mr. Evelyn went into the study and found him lying there on the floor, all stiff, with his face screwed up. Between them, they carried him to bed, but he lies there rigid, as though he were in a fit.”

“Does Mrs. Lovell know?”

Janet, with a tremendous effort, quickened her pace.

“No. Mrs. Lovell is—is asleep. Heavily asleep. I hope she will not wake until after the surgeon has been.”

“She won’t,” Camila told her drily.

Entering the house, she consented to put Robin into Janet’s arms.

“Please lay him in his cradle. I’m going to Mr. Lovell.”

Janet, breathless, was unable to reply.

She went instead to Camila’s room, and, wrapping the baby in his shawl, placed him carefully in the black oaken cradle that once, long ago, Richard himself had unearthed

in a long-forgotten attic. Here, in the sunshine by the window, the child seemed fairly content. For a moment, while she wiped the perspiration from her face, Janet watched him abstractedly. He certainly favoured Mr. Evelyn not at all ; yet, with his tiny waxen features, the close rings of his dark hair, and his brown eyes, clearer and deeper than a trout-stream, he was, she thought, a mighty pretty child. And already he looked about him sagaciously, as though he knew full well how extraordinary was this world into which he had been thrust.

"Poor Robin," she said at length, pulling his shawl about his neck, "I must go, Robin, because your grand-papa's ill. Will you stay quiet and good?"

His grave, dark gaze followed her to the door. He sucked his thumb and looked sympathetic, as though he understood.

Meanwhile in Richard's room, stuffy and silent, Camila crept to the bedside.

She had little or no experience of illness. She saw simply the gross protuberant mound of Richard's body in the bed—his big paunch, his long legs, the twin lumps of his feet. These, and his face. This shocked her so much that she felt for a moment the sensation of physical nausea. She had known this face of Richard's for so many years—bluff, rubicund, weather-beaten, with its beetling eyebrows, cleft chin, and arched, imperious nose. Now it was the same, yet fearfully different, all twisted and askew, the eyes dragged slantways, the mouth distorted, grimacing, drawn upwards in a horrible grin, to reveal his yellowish even teeth. His eyes, too, staring before him, were dreadful to look at, fixed in their uncomprehending misery, and his skin was mottled, dusky purple, with a network of red veins that ill-health had stamped upon him, and reckless living, and exposure to sun and storm.

She waited in silence by the bed, but he made no movement, nor could she perceive upon these leering, haunted features the faintest glimmer of recognition.

She said quietly :

"Richard, it's Camila. Is there anything you want that I can do for you ? "

No answer. Only his eyes, mute and glaring and alive with horror, stared up at her hideously, as though desirous of expressing the hell that he endured. She sank down on her knees beside him.

"Richard, I don't know what you're thinking of. . . . I don't even know how ill you are, until the surgeon comes. But if you are thinking of Brazil, and of the wrong that once he did me, you must forget, as I've forgotten. I've got Robin, and I'm utterly content. Please believe that. Robin has made up for everything. And I'm grateful to you, Richard, more grateful than I can tell you, for the home that you have given me. Do you understand what I'm saying ? "

Still no answer, save the fixed anguish of his staring, glassy eyes.

"Richard," she persevered, "we've been so happy, here at Colerreddy. We've been free to do exactly as we pleased. Evelyn and I are settled, and we have Robin, who means everything in the world. And then there's Harry. You should be proud of Harry—he's so fine and brave and strong——"

She paused ; for suddenly, from this inert mass upon the bed, there came a strange, hoarse, strangled sound. He was trying to speak, but she could not understand.

"What is it ? " she murmured, and laid her ear close to his mouth, but no words came. And then, behind her, she heard a sudden movement. It was Harry. At that moment she realised once more how passionately she loved him. Alone, she had been afraid. Now that he had come, so stern and quiet and oaken-brown, her fears suddenly vanished. Quite suddenly her eyes and cheeks were wet. She was weak, when he was near her. The mere comfort of his presence told her how weak she was.

"Does he want anything ? " Harry whispered.

"I don't know. He cannot speak properly. But he wants you—he *must* want you. I'm so glad you're here."

Harry, standing beside the bed, examined his father closely.

"Fetch your child, Camila," he commanded suddenly.

"Robin? But what good——"

"Make haste."

She hastened to obey him. When she entered her room, Janet was still engaged in soothing the baby.

"Give me Robin, please."

"Of course, Mrs. Lovell. But Mr. Lovell——"

"Please give me Robin quickly."

And she swept from the room, while Janet stood gaping in astonishment.

"That was quick," approved Harry when she reappeared. He bent near to his father and said gently :

"Camila's brought her son, Papa. She's very particular about him—means him to be brought up as a gentleman, and sent to a grand school where he'll learn the ways of fine society . . . not like myself, that can only tend a farm. This brat of hers will be a proper Lovell—very nice in his company, and chased, no doubt, by all the pretty ladies of London. Already he looks knowing—doesn't he?—as though he laughed at me for driving a plough, and wished that he could teach us all the Latin and Greek that he'll learn in a few years' time."

Camila, clasping Robin close, stared in amazement at her lover, forgetting even the prone distorted figure that lay between them. Never before had she heard this tenderness in Harry's voice :—even when he loved her most he was masterful, and would have her know it. Now, watching him, listening to this new sympathy and softness in his voice, she loved him the more for having kept this gentleness hidden from her.

He turned to her impatiently.

"Let him see Robin. How can he know the child is here, when you hide him in your arms?"

Obediently she brought the baby nearer to the quiet gaze that struck such terror into her heart. Once again Richard uttered a dreadful, raucous sound, as though he were being throttled. Harry, leaning close to him, was quicker than she was in interpreting the almost unintelligible question. He muttered rapidly :

"He thinks we're married and has forgotten Evelyn. Say something, quick, Camila, that will make him believe us happy."

Her tears began to blind her. Richard, Harry, even Robin, were swimming in a luminous haze before her eyes. Yet she said loudly, eagerly, determined that this dying man should hear :

"We love one another with all our heart and soul, Richard. We are only content when we are together. When we are separated, we suffer the pains of hell. And the child—our child—has made everything more joyful than it ever was before. And we owe our happiness to you. Without you we should never have known one another—how can we ever repay you for all you've brought to us ? "

Across the bed their eyes met. For one minute, they were content, not turbulent, for both knew that she spoke the truth. For a moment they smiled, at peace with one another. Then Janet came in, followed by Evelyn, ushering behind him the surgeon.

A stroke—apoplexy—these words meant little enough to them. They knew already that he was dying. For a week, ten days, they sat subdued and decorous about the house, while he clung to life tenaciously, as though it had treated him well. And always he remained rigid in his bed, grinning, distorted, powerless, yet staring before him at the wall with a strained and agonised gaze. When he tried to speak, he uttered harsh sounds that seemed to them scarcely human.

The surgeon, bleeding him, said that he was not in pain—that had he been bled months before, he might not now be dying. Harriet at this time fortunately fell ill of a chill, remaining all day in bed to gibe at Janet. Janet,

watching her patiently, told her that Mr. Lovell was suffering from the same ailment.

"Indeed? A great strong man like him? Oh, well, it's all his fault for bringing us to live in this damp rat-hole of a house."

Richard's two sons were every day at Colerreddy—even the farming was temporarily neglected. To Camila Harry was a rock, a tower of strength. He was thoughtful, too, as rough people are apt to be in cases of serious illness, and considerate of the village woman who came from Monk's Tor to nurse his father. Evelyn, fidgeting and fretting, well-nigh drove his wife to distraction. And so the slow days dragged by.


In a fortnight's time they noticed that his eyes were glazing, and this, to their shame, comforted them, for his direct, unswerving gaze had begun to haunt them night and day. His eyes had the power of following them all about the silent house.

He took one whole long day to die, for his strength, that had been so prodigious, ebbed slowly, reluctantly, from his great unwieldy body. He could not move a finger, and his face was still twisted, as though he snarled. Only the film thickening across his eyes could serve to make this death-bed a little less unendurable to those who watched beside him.

Of what was he thinking during that last brief moment before his throat began to rattle and his heart to falter? Of London town, where once he had played the buck and drenched his handkerchief with scent and watched, with cynical indifference, the execution of some poor wretch or other condemned for High Toby on the King's highway? Of that black, half-forgotten day at his club, when, driven desperate for want of money, he had committed the fraud that was to exile him for ever, an aggrieved unrepentant pariah, from the coffee-houses and the boon-companions that he had loved? Of the women he once had known—Harriet youthful, composed and ivory-skinned, Harriet grown old, wolfish, witchlike; of the gypsy that he was

never to possess, dark-eyed, untamed, elusive as a black-bird ? Or the flushed and laughing face of some nameless long-forgotten girl, broken through from the past to smile at him before he died ? Or of the moor in all its moods, misty-grey, scourged with lashing rain, or purple, fragrant with the blooming bells of honey-heather ? Perhaps he thought of none of these, not even of the horses that he had ridden so hard and cherished so dearly ; not even of the wild, sweet, sensuous gypsy music that had never really left his heart and still had power to echo in his ears.

No. Perhaps, before he quite gave up the ghost, he thought for a moment of the simple sights that latterly had brought to him, he knew not why, such peace and consolation. Some drowsy old horse, nodding before a creaking plough ; the harsh murmur of tree-top rookeries, clustered thick with rocking nests ; the sweet smell of a peat-fire, the glowing lively warmth of its bright buttercup flames ; curlews, plovers, wild geese ; grey, solitary birds wheeling forlorn against a sky of deeper grey, a sky of slate ; gorse-bushes in bloom, smothered with the guinea-pieces that were their flowers. These, perhaps, were the things he thought of, and, thinking of them, died at peace.



CHAPTER LV

Between the brothers, set out upon an oaken coffin-stool, lay a neatly-written document of legal appearance.

Evelyn regarded it, for the twentieth time, with a curious eye.

"Harry, will you answer me one question? How can you afford to buy my share of the farm?"

"My portion of Papa's money."

"Then you will have nothing to live on?"

"I'm in no need of it. I'm self-supporting, and have made Pinetree pay for the last two years."

"You're modest, too, I notice."

"Will you either sign your name or let me take myself off for good?"

Evelyn seated himself nonchalantly upon the arm of the sofa.

"There's one clause, Harry, in this pompous document, that I am quite unable to understand. Why, in Heaven's name, should I make Colereddy my headquarters, when I'd sooner live in London?"

"I'll tell you very briefly. Colereddy's mine, but I've no wish to live here during my mother's life-time, nor after, if it comes to that. You're my tenant, and, as you have read in this clause, shall pay me a nominal rent. I'm letting you off lightly, my dear brother—that rent wouldn't keep Camila in stockings."

"She seldom wears them. But why this sudden hunger for my company in your neighbourhood?"

"For two reasons. One is that I will not leave my mother and Janet Williams alone here, and since it suits me to live up at Pinetree, you two must remain."

"And your other reason?"

"Ah, that's more important still." He pushed back a lock of hair from his face and faced his brother defiantly. "Evelyn, has it ever occurred to you that your child, Robin, is the last member of our family?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Only this. That I'll not have him brought up in a dirty London attic, if I can prevent it. He should be bred here, at Coleruddy, which will be his home, as we were bred, but with this difference, that between us we'll see he has a better education than we had, either one of us."

Evelyn laughed. "Very generous, Harry."

"Do you agree?"

"Do you realise that I must go at least three times a year to London?"

"Go then," Harry told him, "but make your headquarters here. You'll be free of the farm—nothing to do but loll about here smudging your pretty pictures and hoarding your share of our father's money to spend in London."

"You'll have Camila to reckon with," Evelyn informed him, regarding his brother's muddy boots contemptuously.

"What has this to do with Camila?"

"Nothing, except that she would probably enjoy a year or two in London."

"Would she? I doubt it. But ask her leave first. I've no objection."

"I'll not ask her leave," Evelyn snapped. "Let her mind her own business and her baby. Where's the pen?"

He signed his name carefully, a bright tress of hair falling about his forehead. Harry watched him sardonically. Now, at least, he had kept his word to Camila, and indeed it suited him to do so. He had no wish for her to be gallivanting in London. While she stayed at Coleruddy, with Harriet and Janet, and Evelyn much away, she was more likely, he thought, to submit to him in the end. And he would wait, he told himself, for many years, if need be. They were both young. But in the end he was determined

to conquer her absurd scruples, and then possibly, unless his mother was still alive, he would take her to live with him at Colereddy and send Evelyn packing to London—there would be only the three of them then—himself, Camila, and the little Robin. And how happy she would be—he'd see to it that he made her happy.

"There," Evelyn grumbled, pushing the document towards his brother, "a crazy contract, but I've signed it."

"As was to your own advantage," Harry reminded him, "and you will receive the first instalment of money due to you on Monday next."

"Unless I do, I'll send a bumble knocking at the doors of Pinetree."

At this moment Camila came into the room. She looked, Harry thought, strangely civilised in her new black dress, with its neat bodice and full skirt, and she seemed to him pale, as though her cheeks missed the reflection of those flaming colours with which she had been wont to deck herself. He was pleased to observe that she still wore her golden ear-drops.

"Harry," she said, ignoring Evelyn, "I firmly believe your mother to be mad. Janet can again do nothing with her."

"What is it this time?" he demanded, stuffing his papers into his pocket. "Is she still determined to dash out her brains against the wall?"

"No. That's over. It's her gowns this time."

"Well, why shouldn't she have gowns? This is the sanest wish she has expressed for years."

"Oh, no, it isn't."

She sat down, as though weary, and turned her face away from him.

"Oh, make haste, Camila!" Evelyn told her irritably.

She continued, still addressing Harry:

"You know that always, since her girlhood, she has worn the same fashions—high-waisted gowns, and scarves, and turbans, and feathers?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Now she insists upon going into black, and nothing will satisfy her but that she must wear the latest modes. She has sent to Plymouth for a fashion-book."

"Why the devil shouldn't she?"

"She can't afford a new trousseau, Harry, without she sells a jewel, and that she will not do. She squanders her money on rubbish—look at her new monkey from foreign parts—and then has nothing for her real needs."

"Oh, God!" he exclaimed, exasperated, and, producing two bank-notes from his pocket, thrust them into her clasped fingers. For a moment their hands touched. Hers was cold, his burning.

"There!" he said. "Tell Janet to get her what she needs and have done with it."

"And drown the monkey" Evelyn suggested. "The filthy, verminous little brute would turn any room into a pigsty."

"I wish you wouldn't interfere when I am talking to Harry."

"Good God," he said, "I find you confoundedly amusing. Is it my mother or yours that we are discussing?"

"When I discuss your mother with you, you either stuff your fingers in your ears or throw a book at me. You take no interest whatever in anything that does not directly concern yourself."

"Indeed? In any case I have made some money to-day, haven't I, Harry?"

But Harry went to put on his coat, which he had left in the window-sill, and took no more notice of his brother.

"Money? How have you made money?"

"Harry has bought my share of Pinetree."

She turned swiftly to look at her lover, where he stood stolidly by the window, wrapping a scarf about his neck.

"Is this true?"

"Yes," he answered coolly, "and you are to be my tenants here at Colereddy, the two of you, to see that my

mother and Janet don't cut one another's throats of a winter evening."

"But Evelyn's business in London?"

"He can go as often as he pleases, or as often as you permit him. But this is to be your home and the home of your child."

He had, then, kept his word! She was pale no longer, but radiant, glowing, as though her face had been lit up. She turned impulsively towards him, and although she was silent, he knew how great must be her joy and gratitude. Had they been alone, he thought gloomily, she would probably have flung her arms about his neck.

Evelyn enquired from the hearthrug:

"You are pleased, then, Camila, to stay on at Colereddy?"

"Pleased! Much more than that! I'm enchanted."

"You realise," he pursued sourly, "that I must leave you at least three times during the year?"

She pulled herself together then, and told him soberly that this news was unwelcome. The next moment, however, her face was once more aflame.

"Think of Robin, Evelyn—how healthy and strong he'll grow and how he'll learn his way about the moor—as we used to do. There's no other place in the world for birds-nesting. And he'll——"

"He'll not run wild, as we did, if that is what you're trying to say," Evelyn told her. "My son's not growing up to be a ploughboy."

Harry smiled.

She murmured abashed:

"I know he isn't. But I am so glad that we're to stay. So very glad."

Evelyn watched her thoughtfully. She would, perhaps, have been an incumbrance in London. Lucy might have felt the loss of his glamour, had he lived there a domesticated husband, complete with wife and child. And she was very wild. He could not, for example, imagine her all tricked up

for a dinner-party at Russell Square. No, she was better where she was. And he himself, who loved the moorland less than the others, even he would rather live at Colerreddy all untrammelled, now that he was rid of the farm, than breathe for ever the smoke and fog of London. No, he was well off, since now he might take his pleasures whenever he wanted. He laughed, and patted Camila's shoulder.


"Be docile, then," he told her, "and attend to your child, since you are now so happy. Where is he?"

"With Janet and your mother. They love him dearly, and indeed, apart from her menagerie, he is the only object in which your mother takes any interest. But they've had him too long—I'll fetch him now."

As she turned to the door, she encountered Harry's look, and thought it none too kind. She guessed that he wanted her to accompany him to the door, that he might the better snatch a moment alone with her. But she was obdurate. She would not see him unless there were other people about. He had spoken of wearing down her powers of resistance. He should have no further opportunity.

"Good night, Harry. And I'll give this money to Janet for your mother."

He looked stern and vindictive as she brushed past him into the hall. Had she seen him for the first time thus, she would have laughed to think that she could ever love this man. She ran upstairs two steps at a time, intent only upon regaining Robin. She sought Robin as though she were herself a frightened child and he her strong and tender protector.



CHAPTER LVI

It was strange, after a few months, to realise how naturally, how easily, life flowed on without Richard. He had been a big and vital figure in their little world ; the planet, however sombre, around which they had revolved like satellites. Yet, in a short time, he had receded so far into the background that it became difficult even to remember what he was like—his loud voice, his roaring laugh, his violent fits of short-lived anger, his weather-beaten, dusky-red face, his great grizzled head, his huge, muddy boots that left tracks of dirt all over the house. Camila, musing upon the past, felt sometimes that she must have dreamed that scene in Harriet's bedroom, that scene in which he had so suddenly transformed himself from a rough but kindly man into a monster, intent only upon shedding Harriet's blood. To no one, she thought, not even to Harry, could she ever recount that story.

Meanwhile Harriet, whose frenzy at Richard's death had been abnormal, almost epileptic, now seemed to have forgotten him in a moment, as completely as though he had never lived. Dressed in the heavy Victorian mourning that she had ordered with such recklessness, she seemed to have lost, with her Byronic turbans and her Empire gowns, the last vestiges of youth and comeliness. In heavy crêpe, with nodding bonnets and full skirts, lace caps and jet, she appeared even taller and grimmer, more ravaged and emaciated, than before. Yet her general health improved ; she snubbed Janet not more than half-a-dozen times a day, and appeared indifferent to the fact that, since she had made over her money to Richard, she must now receive her customary allowance from her sons. Her parrot swore

back at her when she abused it, and her wizened, black-faced little monkey scratched its fleas sadly, as though regretting the tropical climate from which it had been snatched. Still she drank, but not quite so immoderately. She had begun to grow old.

Every year Evelyn paid three mysterious visits to London. Upon his return, he invariably told Camila that he had sold several pictures, and he always seemed well supplied with money. Of late, however, she had come to suspect him. Instinctively she felt that some rich woman or other contributed to his income. But she was indifferent. So long as he left her in peace with Robin, he might do as he pleased. She did not know that, although he made love to Mrs. Abels, he amused himself during his spare time with a little ballet-dancer, trim and slight as a fairy, with a Cockney accent that intrigued him by its novelty. Mrs. Abels, however, even richer since the death of a long moribund uncle, became more foolishly indulgent every time he saw her. Sometimes she spoke of a will that left everything to him. He caressed her smilingly.

Since the death of his father, Harry had avoided Cole-reddy like the plague. He had thought, when he bought the farm, to conquer her ; having failed, he stayed away, bitter and isolated, working each day from dawn till dusk. He did not despair. When the child grew older, when it needed her less, she would assuredly bring it to its father up at Pinetree. Meanwhile, he would flatter her no longer by seeking secret meetings. Let her think that he had forgotten her.

Soon the months lengthened into years. Two years, three. Robin could run now, and speak, and clap his hands whenever he saw his mother. He was a pretty child, strong, berry-brown, like Camila, with round cheeks, thick, curling, dark hair, gay eyes that laughed whenever he saw the great Tor, which was as familiar to him as his nursery. His world was very pleasant. After his mother, he loved Janet, who was kind and patient with him, and never angry, as Camila

sometimes was. Then his grandmother, of whom he was not in the least afraid, and whose room amused him, with the noisy croaking parrot and the monkey that chattered at him, showing its teeth, and would never let him play with it, as he so much wished to do, although his mother had forbidden it. Then there was his father, of whom he was not overfond, but whose wavy hair he loved to pull. But his father took but little notice of him and was a strange person, whom it was strictly forbidden to disturb. Of another, less familiar figure, that of his Uncle Harry, he was more or less unconscious, forgetting strangers with all the blithe indifference of childhood. His mother, who was always there, was a creature to run to for protection, whenever he hurt himself or was afraid. Then she comforted him, and seemed a magnificent being, strong and dark, kind and tender. He loved, too, to play with the jingling gold drops that hung from her ears, and with her bangles, and with the magic tresses which, invisible during the day, appeared each night in a dense black cloud to hang like a mantle over the back of her chair.

Sometimes at night he awoke to hear the voices of his parents raised in loud and bitter dispute. His father would rave, until the child hid his head in terror, and then his mother would laugh, but not at all as though she were amused. Sometimes, however, they talked quite amicably together, and then he would stir himself for a second in his little bed, too lazy even to demand attention. On such a night, although he was asleep, a conversation took place in his presence that caused much grief and fury to his mother.

Evelyn suddenly remarked, before extinguishing his candle :

“ Oh, Camila, I had forgotten to tell you something that you will find excessively droll.”

“ Well, what ? Make haste—I’m sleepy.”

Evelyn told her delightedly, chuckling to himself :

“ You’ll never believe it. Harry has a mistress, hidden away at Pinetree ! ”

She was silent for so long that he at length demanded :

"Did you hear me, or are you asleep already?"

She answered abruptly, turning her back :

"No, I heard. Who is she?"

"God knows. I believe, as a matter of fact, that it's some girl from the hiring-fair to whom he took a fancy. Can you imagine it, Camila, and don't you pity her, living up at that lonely farm with such a sulky devil? Really, I feel inclined to rescue her."

She lay silent, motionless, until he blew out the candle. Then the fury raging within her heart made her bite her lips until the blood streamed down her chin. Her mouth, even her arms, soon bore scars and bruises to tell of her rage. Yet she must not let Evelyn discover her plight; and so she lay watchful, trembling from head to foot, until he slept by her side, wishing with all her soul that she could murder Harry and have done. At length, when all was quiet in the room, she slipped from her bed to Robin's cot, where she gathered the child gently in her arms and brought him back to the bed, in which he settled down comfortably against her breast. The warmth of this little nestling body was so sweetly consoling that she moved slightly to let her wildly beating heart rest more closely against his own, and so, perhaps, find peace. The child stirred drowsily but did not wake. She laid her cheek against his round, fluffy head and tried to sleep, but could not; for her eyes remained strained and wakeful, and her brain raced dizzily.

Nor did the rage and anguish that seemed to claw at her show any abatement. Such blind intensity of hatred, such mad and savage jealousy of this unknown woman,—these were even more powerful, more uncontrolled, more part of herself, of her mind and body, than was her passionate, unbalanced love for Harry. That love, indeed, had already been partly stifled; this dark, smouldering rage which now possessed her must be a hundred times stronger, since all through the night it held her fast in its devilish grip.

Yet, since she was weary, she slept a few hours, to be awakened by the voice of Evelyn, raised in reproof.

"Camila, how many times have I told you not to spoil that child by taking him into the bed with you immediately he starts to whimper?"

She made no answer.

"Do you hear, Camila?"

"Don't talk to me."

He examined her attentively. She was, he noticed, ashen pale, with great dark stains about her eyes.

"What's the matter? Are you ill?"

"No."

"Then why——"

"Oh, leave me alone, will you? I'm in no mood for your complaints."


She shook out her black hair, that hung in a dishevelled mass about her face, and seemed to him at the moment too wild, too savage, for any rational conversation.

"Oh, go to the devil and get dressed and leave me," he told her angrily. "Of all the bad-tempered shrews and scolds I ever met, you take the prize."

She made no answer.

When she was dressed, she took Robin upstairs to Janet in Harriet's room.

Then, moving slowly, as though she were very tired, she went into the dining-room, where she lit the fire, for she was cold that morning, as though her bones were made of ice.



CHAPTER LVII

Soon the bright flames, dancing so carelessly before her, brought warmth to her body. Then she thought she would visit Pinetree and tear this other woman's face to pieces. But soon she decided otherwise. It might please Harry to humiliate her before his love, or it might even occur to him to keep her prisoner against her will, separated from Robin. In any case, he was no more likely than herself to behave rationally in such a situation.

Surely, she brooded, such violent and relentless hatred as her own must in some way communicate itself to where Harry lay at ease, teasing his farmer's girl. If not, of what avail were curses or spells or the magic of the gypsy-people? In that case there could be no Elf-King, no Wild Swan, no faery country of Lyonesse, no ghostly Dartmoor Stables. And these existed, of that she was sure; she had seen some of them herself. And it struck her then that the Wild Swan, that had been seen by all three of them as children, could have been no happy augury, as they had so impetuously imagined, but was, perhaps, nothing but a disguise for the Elf-King himself—the Elf-King, wild and beautiful and evil. Certainly, not much happiness had come to her from either of the brothers, nor had she brought much joy to them. She remembered suddenly that when Richard first brought her to the house, he had warned Prudence that she was a gypsy, a weaver of spells, one who could ill-wish whenever she desired.

Ill-wishing. She had not heard that word spoken for years, not since before the birth of Robin. Where had she last heard it? She had mentioned it to Harry, certainly, in jest, but before then it had been thrust back into her memory

by Mrs. Fell, the Wise Woman of Monk's Tor. Mrs. Fell had accused her of sorcery, and Mrs. Fell should know. Was she, then, by virtue of her Egyptian blood, a witch-woman against her will?

She pondered, poking the fire. Brazil's old mother, a toothless hag, had spoken often, and with some glee, of her own powers as a sorceress. The best method of ill-wishing, this old woman had often told her, was to fashion a clay image of your enemy, all spiked with pins, and thrust it into the fire, cursing, and whispering, very low, the Lord's Prayer backwards. Then, surely, he whom you hated would swiftly pine and die.

She mused for some time. It would be ecstasy to make Harry suffer as she was suffering now. She could but try. She could soon find clay in the garden. She sprang to her feet, her eyes brilliant, then suddenly recollected that she did not know the Lord's Prayer at all, either forwards or backwards. Janet's room? She sped upstairs, slipped into that chaste chamber, pounced upon a plain black book lying near the bed, and darted downstairs like a phantom.

In the garden she astonished the elderly villager employed in weeding a bed by demanding instantly a shovelful of clay. This took some time, and she waited impatiently, tapping her foot, her hair blown behind her ears, a veritable Medusa. Finally she received a sticky yellowish mass, and retreated once more to the dining-room.

She then discovered that she had forgotten the pins and repaired once more to Janet's room, which this time was occupied.

"I beg your pardon, but I must borrow a packet of pins. Can you lend them to me, please? I'm in great haste, or I wouldn't pester you."

"Of course I will, Mrs. Lovell."

But Janet was once more alarmed by the paleness of Camila's face, by her great, glittering, feverish eyes and her disordered appearance, with her black hair hanging in snaky locks about her neck and shoulders.

"Here are some pins."

Camila rushed away without even pausing to ask whether Robin was behaving himself in his grandmother's room. Janet thought her distraught, and shivered, as though a cold wind had blown into the room.

Downstairs, crouched over a low stool, prayer-book and pins by her side, Camila began to mould her mass of clay into the shape that was to symbolise Harry. A queer, clumsy torso, a round dumpling of a head, stumpy arms and legs, and, to finish it off, she hardly knew why, a row of tiny pebbles supposed to represent his waistcoat-buttons. Now for the pins. But, as she stretched out her hand for them, she paused for a moment to study the crude mannikin on her lap. This, then, was Harry—this pot-bellied, clumsy puppet, this rude clay doll that looked more like Robin's work than his mother's. She counted the pebbles that stood for the waistcoat-buttons. Seven. And then suddenly, she knew not why, she began to laugh until the tears rolled down her cheeks. So this was sorcery ! How utterly absurd ! How ridiculous, how childish, how grotesque ! And in one moment she would have stuck her pins, quite solemnly, into the round clay belly of her image ! She laughed so much that she was forced to hold her head in her hands, and her head felt like bursting. At length, wiping her eyes, she kicked the clay figure half across the room. And then, as one limp leg fell off, she could hardly help laughing once more.

In a moment, however, she stood watchful, silent, hearing the sound of voices in the hall outside. Her heart beat fast as the door was flung open and Harry and Evelyn came together into the room.

"There !" Evelyn was saying. "You see that though I am too busy to be disturbed, Camila's here, and will find Janet for you, if you really wish to see Mama." And he turned to his wife soothingly :

"Are you better, my love ?"

"I was never ill," she told him harshly.

"I beg your pardon. And now I must return to my work."

Shutting the door, he left them together.

She had no longer any desire to laugh. She said, coldly, bitterly, thrusting her pale face close to his :

"You've a mistress."

"Indeed I haven't."

"Oh, don't lie. We all know you keep a woman at Pinetree."

"Let me finish, before you interrupt. . . . I had a woman at Pinetree, yes, but only for three days. She minced her words, so I showed her the door."

She became almost incoherent.

"How dare you ! How dare you ! Never again—I'll never speak to you again. How I hate you, how I wish——"

"Camila, you've no one but yourself to blame. Why should I live like a monk when you yourself, who continue to refuse yourself to me, have a husband and child to keep you company ? No, if you remain obdurate, you must accustom yourself to these ways of mine, but I can only repeat what I have said before—that there's always a welcome for you at Pinetree, if you come for good, and that if I kept a whole harem of women there, they should all be turned out on to the moor at your bidding."

She was sobbing.

"You said you never would—in the trap driving home that night."

"Ah, but you, who are the wiser, said that I would, and you were right. But what's the odds ? It makes no difference to our relationship."

"Indeed ? Just look at that," and she pointed to her broken image that had rolled beneath the table.

"What is it ? Some plaything of Robin's ?"

"No, you fool, it's a witchen thing that I was about to stick pins in, the better to ill-wish you."

He went in silence to retrieve the broken puppet. Holding it carefully before his eyes, he remarked at length :

"You have not flattered me, Camila. It's a spiteful portrait. Am I really so gross? And is my paunch so dilated? But come now, you haven't finished it, nor yet set in the pins. Did I interrupt you in your work?"

She was silent, leaning against the mantelpiece, her head buried in her arms, and he realised that she was making a desperate effort to control herself. He continued, pleasantly:

"If you don't intend to complete the spell, Robin might like your witch doll to play with. Look, I'll roll it in my handkerchief and leave it here for him to find."

As she still refused to answer, he came nearer and spoke to her softly, so that his lips almost touched her shoulder.

"Camila, have you lost your senses? All this black magic for a little wench that was sent back to her father, with my compliments, after two nights!"

She murmured, her voice stifled in her sleeve:

"You can't even remain faithful to me. And I've loved you so—loved you so! But you're like other men—like all the rest of them."

"Indeed? Well, pack up your bundle, fetch Robin, come back to Pinetree, and we'll see whether or not I can be faithful to you."

"Never, never again will I go near that house."

His eyes narrowed, became hard and pitiless. He was beginning to lose his patience.

"Since you refuse, Camila, are we to go through this scene each time I take a woman?"

She turned and faced him. Once more they were hostile, thin-lipped, vindictive, and their eyes burned dark with fury.

"Go away from here, or you'll drive me from the room. Am I to have no peace from you? Go for good, and leave me to be happy with Robin."

He laughed.


"But for myself there would be no Robin."

She turned impetuously towards the door, no longer able to trust herself to speak. But he followed her.

"This jealousy of yours is very flattering, Camila. In your heart of hearts you love me still. One day you'll come, whether or not I keep a whole seraglio. But I'll not hurry you."

She slammed the door behind her with a crash that made the windows shiver.

He smiled, looking down at the clay doll wrapped in his handkerchief. It amused him to think that Camila should have been trying all the morning to bewitch him only to fail in the end. Still grinning, he placed the image in his pocket.



CHAPTER LVIII

Time passed swiftly at Coleruddy, since each day was so much like the last. Robin was growing up, and it seemed as though he had hardly come into the world before he was preparing to celebrate his eighth birthday. For a year now he had been having simple lessons from Mr. O'Shea, and although the parson had grown old, and increasingly subject to fits of abstraction, the boy could already read and write. Sometimes, to his amusement, Mr. O'Shea became confused, and called him Harry, which was of course his uncle's name. A younger man, having known the two, might have been forgiven this error, for they were much alike. Yet Robin, for all his rough, raven-dark hair, his warm brown eyes that were almost black, and his red-and-brown skin, tanned like an Italian's, was more slightly-built than Harry at his age, swifter, more agile, but not so strong. Nor was he sulky, but the merriest child that ever breathed, and always in mischief. Yet he adored his mother and stood in some awe of her, knowing that with her he must not go too far. Janet was his slave, and to Harriet he might say what he pleased without offence. Sometimes he told her that she was like the wolf in "Red-Riding-Hood" when it donned cap and nightgown the better to masquerade as a grandmother, but he received no reproof for his impudence, only a basket of candied sweetmeats and a caress from her long, thin, claw-like hand.

Yet, when he had been especially naughty, and his mother fixed him with her dark, piercing eye, he felt afraid and did not relish the tone of voice in which she spoke to him at such times, so bitter was it, so disdainful, as though she had utterly ceased to love him. His father he was rather inclined

to dislike. He was little, to begin with, and already Robin despised little men ; he wore his hair, presumably because he was an artist, in a mop of silken curls, and he was plump too, and his hands were white and smooth like a lady's. Moreover, the slightest noise irritated him to a frenzy, and it was impossible to embark upon any sensible game in this unsympathetic presence.

On the other hand, his Uncle Harry, whom he saw but rarely, seemed by contrast a magnificent man,—he was so big, so swarthy-dark and lordly in his manner. Robin wished secretly that when his mother was with Uncle Harry, as she seldom was, she would not address him in that glacial, contemptuous voice which was so hateful, but would speak, as she so often did to her son, with those deep, soft accents that moved him like music. And, for some mysterious reason, he was not allowed to visit his uncle up at Pinetree. Yet, meeting Harry in the village, where he led a horse bigger than an elephant, and sleeker, shinier than a chestnut, he was put aloft to bestride its mighty back, and Harry explained to him, kindly enough, the meaning of the glittering brass trappings upon the harness. These carved sunflowers and medallions of stars and rising suns glinting brighter than gold apparently served their purpose by protecting the horse from the power of the Evil Eye.

What, Robin demanded, was the Evil Eye ?

Harry laughed.

" I know a lady that thinks she has one."

As the boy pondered, his uncle said suddenly :

" You're a black little rascal, Robin. Do they let you run wild on the moor when you please ? "

" More or less. But I have my lessons, and Mama is frightened if I stay away too long."

" Indeed. Well, take my advice and run out near the Tors whenever you please. You can't be too long upon the moor to learn its secrets. Have you seen any pixies ? "

" I thought so once. But I must admit they were conies, when I got near them."

"Don't despair—you'll see 'em yet. Meanwhile, stay out in the open as much as you can."

"I do, but Mama's very angry if I'm late for my supper."

"Really? Well, I remember Mama herself being late for many a meal in the old days. Do you love her very much, Robin?"

The boy blushed uncomfortably.

"Yes, of course."

"She's beautiful, isn't she?" Harry pursued carelessly.

"Yes."

"And at her best when her eyes flash with temper and she bites her lip and taps her foot upon the ground. You don't think so? Well, let us talk of other things, of the Elf-King, for instance. How would you like to meet him of a winter night, eh, all winged, and crystal-bright with snow, riding to death his charger—which some say is the North Wind?"

"I wouldn't," said Robin, firmly, "I would prefer the pixies, who Mama says are little dancing hump-backed men all dressed in green, with red caps on their heads."

Here they drew up at the Magpie Inn.

"Be off with you now," said Harry, lifting his son from the horse, "and sixpence for you if you bring me a moorhen's egg before dusk."

Robin's face fell. He said frankly:

"But they won't allow me to visit you at Pinetree."

"Who? Mama again?"

"Mama and Papa."

"Why not?"

Robin began to feel that he had not perhaps been altogether tactful.

"We'll," he replied carelessly, "I can't tell you for certain, but I believe it's something to do with a lady. A lady they don't like. But I don't know her name."

"Nor I," said Harry. "Don't bother about it—there's nothing to see at my home."

But Robin still hesitated.

"Do you know," he said casually, "that in three days time it will be St. Valentine's Day?"

"What of it? Have you a sweetheart already?"

"No! But it's my birthday."

"Indeed? I shan't forget. And now, farewell to you, my gypsy."

"Gypsy?" Robin called back, plunging into the first puddle he met. "I'm not a gypsy, and Mama would box your ears if she heard you call me that. She's afraid of them!"

And he disappeared, hopping and skipping, round the corner.

When his birthday dawned, Janet insisted upon baking him a white iced cake with a pink sugar rose plastered in the middle. Camila, whose culinary knowledge had not improved, contented herself with sticking eight tiny coloured candles about the rose.

"Mrs. Lovell insists upon coming down to tea," Janet told her, wiping her hands.

"Indeed? Very kind of her," Camila commented abstractedly. Janet eyed her uncertainly. How dreadful if they chose to quarrel before Robin on his birthday! But Camila appeared serene, aloof, filled with a cold dignity that had increased greatly during the last few years. She was still, of course, very young, Janet reflected, yet she had lost the wildness that had made her so different from other women seven years ago, when she could be seen hugging her baby, barelegged, with golden-brown skin and dark elflocks tumbling about her eyes. Now she was paler, since she went less upon the moors, and her braided hair was lustrous, black and smooth as silk. This sleek head, and the immobility of her straight Egyptian profile, sometimes made her seem like some statue, chiselled from marble, and the dead black of her eyes, so long and watchful, served to increase the impression that she had of late grown hard and stern, and had no affection save for Robin, although in the

old days she had been warm-hearted enough, and impulsive, and glib, too glib, of tongue. She appeared taller, too, in her grosgrain bodice and swelling skirts of bright tartan ; yet no longer did she seem to Janet devilish, possessed, but only a proud woman, contemptuous of her husband and her home, and desolate too, perhaps because she had so little to occupy her mind.

And Mr. Harry ? But Mr. Harry came so seldom to Coleruddy that Janet had almost forgotten his face. At night, before she slept, when first she closed her eyes, it was the face of Evelyn that appeared before her, beautiful, appealing, in spite of its dissipation, in spite of his indifference towards her, and his querulous tongue, and his body that was growing soft and plump.

“ Where’s Robin ? ” Camila enquired abruptly.

“ He went out to play near the cedar-tree. Shall I call him ? ”

“ No, thank you. I don’t want him yet.”

And she wandered into the study that once had been Richard’s, but was now littered with half-finished daubs by Evelyn.

Here, lounging near the fire, she found her husband reading a book, clad in a brocade dressing-gown and wearing on his curling hair an absurd embroidered smoking cap with a silken tassel. She studied him for a moment in silence. The same bright, clustering hair, the same grey eyes, clear and cold, and yet, when he bent his face, a double chin. The same white satin skin, smooth as milk, and yet a protuberant stomach that even (when he went to London) a corset could not entirely conceal. His hands, she observed, detachedly, would soon be puffy, and his dressing-gown could not conceal his thick and fleshy thighs. How swiftly, how relentlessly, had his youthful beauty fled from him ! Soon anyone who looked at him would say, “ What a quaint little round man, and why doesn’t he cut his hair ! ” And once—how long ago it seemed !—she had lavished upon this creature the sweet freshness of her first

impetuous love. She knew, too, that he was unfaithful to her, having once accompanied him to London and dined at Russell Square, but she was indifferent, untouched. He might do as he pleased.

"What do you want?" he asked her, yawning.

"Only that it's Robin's birthday. Are you coming to drink tea with him in the drawing-room?"

"No, my dear. I'm busy."

"Have you given him a present?"

"A present? Let him first make amends to me for smashing this window with his catapult."

"Oh, can you never forget anything? You know that he was sorry—he cried himself to sleep."

"Perhaps, but not from sorrow. He's frightened of you and of your gypsy rages."

"Don't say that," she told him angrily.

"Why not? Are you so ashamed of your blood?"

"No. On the contrary, I am proud of it. But I won't have those remarks made before him. Do you wish him to grow up wild?"

Evelyn laughed.

"He's black enough, in all conscience. He's your child—not mine. You're responsible for him."

"Exactly. That's why I'll not have talk of gypsies in his presence."

"Good God," he said, "I can't stand much more of your ill-temper. I shall go to London in a few weeks."

"I hope," she sneered, "that this time you will have some pictures to sell."

She left him then and went out to the front door, where she found Janet.

"Where's Robin?"

"Still out by the cedar-tree. Shall I go and fetch him?"

"Oh, it's of no importance. I'll find him myself." But Janet, anxious for a breath of fresh air, accompanied her uninvited across the lawn.

CHAPTER LIX

Robin, being occupied, did not hear them approach. He had stretched a sheet of sacking from the trunk of the cedar to a rough pole put up by himself. Beneath this awning he had built a tiny fire, that crackled sulkily, as though unwilling to burn, a fire that sent a curl of bluish smoke into the sky, and before this blaze he crouched cross-legged, like a small Turk, his face smeared with smuts and resin.

"Oh, look!" cried Janet, "he thinks himself an Indian, the rogue, with his wigwam and his fire, as though he were ready at any moment to start upon the warpath!"

She glanced at Camila, somewhat disconcerted by the silence with which this remark was received, and thought her companion even more like a cold statue of a woman than ever before. Camila's profile was straight and stern, while her eyes, those dead black eyes that so much disconcerted the companion, were fixed, intent and hostile, upon her son.

"Robin!" she called sharply.

The boy turned his face towards her, laughing and dirty, pretending to warm his hands before the fire.

"Robin, what are you doing?"

"Oh, nothing much," he informed her composedly, "only I have built a tent, and lit a fire, and feel as happy as a king. Is it time for tea?"

"Stamp out that fire," she commanded in a quiet voice.

"But why, Mama? It's not harming——"

"Do as I tell you. And then pull down that sacking. You have no time for such nonsense. Make haste."

He glanced at her, rebellious, and observed her dark and furious look. He sighed as he obeyed. Really women, even his mother, were unreasonable. And Janet, his ally, looked pale and frightened. He obeyed, scowling.

"Come here," she said.

"Oh, what is it, Mama?"

"Don't let me catch you playing those foolish games again. You are eight years old now, and too big for such nonsense, even on your birthday. Indians—that's a game for little children—not for boys of your age."

"But," he explained, "I wasn't playing Indians."

"What, then?"

"I don't know. I wanted a tent, and a fire beneath my tent. I don't exactly know why. But really, I never thought of Indians."

"Well, go and wash yourself before tea. Your face is black. Hurry, Robin."

He scampered off, and Janet, watching Camila's bitter lips, thought once more of mountains made from molehills.

"He's a great rascal," she ventured at length, as they walked back towards the house.

Camila made no answer.

Robin, running towards the house, wondered more than ever why his mother, who had been all day so kind and benevolent, should so suddenly lose her temper for no apparent reason. She didn't mind his climbing the cedar-tree and, indeed, only laughed to watch him swinging like a squirrel from the topmost branches. Why, then, should she flare up so suddenly at seeing him sitting, quiet and peaceful, beneath his strip of tent, with his fire smoking before him? As for this talk of Indians, it was ridiculous. You couldn't play at Indians by yourself. Once, certainly, years ago it seemed, he had collected a band of village-children, stuck turkey-feathers in their hair, and constituted himself their chief. But the children had been so stupid that the game had only lasted for a day or two.

This tent, this fire, these were something different.

The tent was his house, the fire for cooking his supper. What harm was he doing ? He shook his head as he thought once more of the folly of grown-ups.

After scrubbing his face, he went down to the drawing-room, where he found his grandmother seated in the candlelight, majestic in black silk and a nodding bonnet.

"Hullo, Grandmamma ! I'm so glad you've come to see me, for you know, don't you, that this is my own birthday tea-party ?"

She grinned, showing long, yellowish teeth and answered hoarsely in her croaking voice :

"Your eighth birthday isn't it ? Dear God, how time flies ! And what would you say, eh, if I informed you that I had no gift for you ?"

"I should be astonished," Robin told her hastily.

"Indeed ? Well come near to me, and let me show you something."

He obeyed promptly. Her haggard, witch-like face was a mass of wrinkles, a mask of white paint, yet her eyes still gleamed with the brightness of black diamonds.

"You're a dark rogue," she said suddenly, looking full at him, "like Harry, but less sulky. I'll bargain they have trouble with you before you grow a beard."

"The present, Grandmamma !" he cajoled, and put his hand upon her thin, shaking arm.

"Ah-ha, the present. . . . Well, you monkey, look down at this and tell me what you think."

Carefully she unrolled from a covering of black velvet an ornate gold watch, of early 18th century make, the back all painted with clouds and garlands and naked laughing cherubs.

Robin was awed.

"It's not for me ? A real watch ? Oh, don't let Mama say that I may not use it until I am grown-up ! Please, Grandmamma ! It's the most beautiful watch I ever did see !"

"Your Mama ?" her attention wandered, and she

gave a cackling laugh. "Your Mama, my dear, once ate her dinner in the kitchen, like a servant-girl."

"Why?" Robin asked, but he was not really attending, being occupied in playing with his watch.

"I can't exactly remember," she said in a peevish voice, "but she did, and t'was by my orders."

"Oh, look," he cried suddenly, "look at my birthday cake! Do you think they would be very angry if I picked off a bit of sugar, just for you and me?"

But in this project he was defeated, for Camila and Janet came into the room.

"Really," said Camila, on being shown the watch, "that belonged to Richard, and it's too good for him to play with and pull the hands to pieces."

He darted at her a look of defiance. This, after all, was his birthday, and when she was otherwise engaged, he slipped the watch into his pocket. There were more presents—a ship from his mother to sail on the pond, and a music-box from Janet, that played a tinkling tune when he turned the handle. And Lily Betts, become a mature and dominating woman, had made him a plate of his favourite ginger-snaps.

"And now," said Janet, "he must cut his cake, mustn't he?"

The short February day was nearly over; already outside it was moth-dark, and the drawing-room window glowed into the garden amber-bright, with panes of shining gold, for the room inside was made brilliant by its great clusters of twinkling candles, the ruddy blaze of its bright peat-fire. Robin, dancing like an imp before the flames, was all unconscious of the strange things that had happened here before his birth; he had no idea that it was into this apartment that Richard had first brought his starving gypsy grand-parents; that it was here, where he now capered, that Harriet had once taxed his mother with being in love with his uncle Harry. Nor did he know that his mother, returning barefoot to Coleruddy from the

wilds, had first attracted attention by tapping upon that uncurtained window which now shed a marigold light upon the sombre garden without.

"Oh, yes," he cried to Janet, "please give me a knife."

"First," said Camila from the armchair near the window, "you must blow out the candles, all together, if you can."

"H'm," and he considered the cake. "I'll do my very best. Look, Mama, I'm going to collect all my breath."

Bending his rough, tawny head close to the table, he puffed out his cheeks, intensely solemn.

"Make haste," she told him, "or you'll suffocate before my eyes."

He blew with all his force. The circlet of tiny flames quivered for a moment and then vanished for ever. The gay little candles sent forth a midget finger of smoke, and there was a smell of smouldering wax.

"How clever I am!" he cried, entirely forgetting his manners.

"Here's the knife," Janet told him, "and pray don't cut yourself."

He seized it with both hands and derived an exquisite pleasure from plunging the blade deep, deep, into the spicy richness of the cake. He paused, enthralled, to gaze upon the clean, strong cut that he had made, at the shivered bits of icing and crumbling almond-paste.

"Take some to your grandmother," Camila suggested.

He obeyed, carefully shovelling much sugar upon the plate, but when he presented it to Harriet, he found she was asleep. Robin, as usual, was undaunted.

"Grandmamma! Will you please wake up and eat some birthday-cake?"

She nodded, half-opening her sharp, black-currant eyes.

"God bless my soul! What impudence! How dare you, Harry?"

"It isn't Harry," the boy told her, laughing. "You're still asleep. Grandmamma—it's Robin."

Then she woke, and chuckled to herself, and stretched out one skinny trembling hand to grab the cake, and stuffed it greedily into her mouth, with very little regard for good manners.

"Now you, Mama," and as he passed her chair, he bent to kiss her. As he was not demonstrative, she thrilled to this embrace, clasping him so tight that he was almost stifled. Wriggling, he escaped.

"Janet?"

"I've taken the liberty," said Janet in her prim pleasant voice, "of helping myself."

Camila stirred in her chair.

"Someone is outside in the hall."

"I hear nothing," said Janet, listening.

"Papa?" Robin suggested, and the corners of his mouth turned down.

It was not Evelyn, but Harry, that walked into the room. At once the three women were sensible of his disturbing presence. Janet glanced at him fearfully, Harriet awoke from the coma produced by indulgence in rich cake, and Camila, seated motionless, appeared more than ever like a woman chiselled from stone, save for her dark and fixed and smouldering eyes. Once again, thought Janet, uncomprehending, evil was stirring between these two, an evil not even to be diminished by the merriment, the innocent simplicity, of their little gathering.

"Good day, Mama," said Harry genially to his mother.

The old lady stirred.

"Good day be damned, if you have come to pester me about my money."

"Well, I haven't. I have come to visit Robin, this being, I believe, his birthday."

"Have some cake," Robin invited him eagerly.

"Cake, no. I am no great eater of sweetmeats."

He flung off his big coat, avoiding any glance in Camila's direction.

"Come here, Robin, and look at this handkerchief. What does it suggest to you?"

"A bundle."

"So it is, but let's unwrap it. Careful, now, lest you hurt yourself."

As they knelt together on the floor, their strange resemblance to one another was unmistakable. Even Janet, ignorant and innocent as she was, hovered on the verge of guessing this long-hidden secret.

"Why," cried Robin, absorbed, "it's a great heap of thorns?"

"Indeed? Well, prod them, and watch them move."

"Oh, Uncle Harry, it's a live hedgehog! Is this for me? Is this really for me?"

"Yes. Do you like your present?"

But the boy was too engrossed to reply. Enchanted, he watched emerging from the mass of spines a jet-black snout and bright inquisitive eyes.

"You must treat him with deference," Harry commanded, "for he's an old grandpapa, and not used to rough handling. If you let him live in the kitchen, and give him bread-and-milk to eat, every night he'll kill a hundred blackbeetles. That's his way of showing gratitude."

"I love him already," said Robin.

Harry rose to his feet and went towards the fire, where he stood warming his hands.

"Once," he informed Robin deliberately, "a lady compared me to a hedgehog. My spines, she said, were always abristle."

"It was a compliment," Robin assured him.

"No. Not in this case. Nor was it meant as such. But afterwards it made me laugh. Where's your papa?"

"Working," Robin answered vaguely, and turned to his mother.

"May I take my hedgehog to the kitchen?"

"Yes," she said, in a dry voice.

He ran away enchanted. Janet followed him, anxious to

discover if Harriet's bedroom fire was burning well. Harriet drowsed once more upon the sofa, and the two were left alone.

For a time they were silent. He smiled to himself, standing before the fire, and noticed that her eyes were vindictive, like those of a Medusa. After a time he went across to her.

"Drop all this ill-humour, will you? I've had my bellyful of your damned temper."

As she did not reply, he continued :

"Really, you make me inclined to abduct Robin and hide him from you up at Pinetree. You'd come fast enough then, and I'd see you were exceedingly civil before you got him back. You're still a vixen, but you have lost your wildness. However, given the power, I'd make you wild enough again. At the moment I'd willingly box your ears."

She rose to her feet, with much swirling of voluminous tartan skirts.

"Pray don't shout, or you'll wake your mother. I have nothing to say to you, or you to me."

She went across to the fireplace, where she stood with averted face. He noticed with derision her cameo brooch, her gold bangles, and the satin sleekness of her black head.

"You've become quite a grand lady," he informed her scornfully, "yet you were not so grand, all the same, that night at Pinetree. Your cloak, I remember, was torn, as was your stocking, and there were burrs in your hair . . . you were not particular then, only glad to be in my kitchen, in my arms, when the thunder crashed above our heads."

She was silent.

He continued, mercilessly :

"And then that other day, when I found you trying to ill-wish me with a silly clay image, all because I'd taken a woman home with me ! How I laughed that night—I was near to bursting !"

She whispered, her face still averted :


"One day I'll kill you."

"You have no longer the strength, my angel, since you became so fine a lady."

They had no idea that behind them, Harriet, suddenly wakeful, had for some time sat fixing them with bright and beady eyes. The old lady was vastly amused ; for years she had suspected some mysterious bond between these two ; now, in a moment, once and for all, her curiosity was satisfied. She was jubilant, like a naughty child with a secret, and had no pity for the tempest of unhappiness raging in both their hearts. Nor had she any desire that Evelyn should know of their attachment. For the time being she had forgotten his very existence ; her brain, so clear on many points, had no longer any room for more than a few vivid portraits of the persons around her.

Suddenly she chuckled loudly, and then they turned to face her, startled, suspicious.

But at that moment, Robin, excited and happy, came running back into the room.



CHAPTER LX

A month later Robin and his mother were walking down towards the village. The day was clear and bright, with flashing sunlight and a rushing, vigorous breeze. The wind played havoc with Camila's huge skirts of fine black cloth, edged with turkey-red, even with her short alpaca jacket and the trim bonnet perched jauntily upon her head. She smiled sardonically as she remembered how once, years ago, when she had been wont to run about the village all dishevelled, her stockings torn and her hair loose upon her back, the villagers had referred to her insolently as "Lovell's Egyptian." Now, of course, matters were very different. She was dressed grandly and she walked with a haughty air, holding her head like a queen's. Nor did the swinging of her hoop disconcert her ; on the contrary she derived much satisfaction from this constant reminder of her own state-
liness.

"Mama," asked Robin, who carried his ship beneath his arm, "what are you going to do in the village? And will I have time to sail my boat on the pond?"

"I expect so," she said. "I must see the new carrier, who goes to town to-morrow, and visit the blacksmith about the spoke that was broken last night when William drove the trap. Yes, you'll have time to sail your boat, but don't tumble in the water unless you wish to make me very angry."

"I won't," he promised airily. Prancing at her side, dressed in the hideous clothes of his epoch, a holland tunic, baggy knickerbockers, striped red-and-white stockings, and stout button boots, he contrived, nevertheless, to appear a graceless imp, with his brown, sparkling eyes, his wilful,

laughing mouth, with its red curved lips, and the wild tangle of black hair that sometimes, when the wind blew, spired forth in elf-locks from his temples as though he wore horns, like some youthful dweller in a Grecian forest.

She glanced at him affectionately, smiling, too, to see him look so gay and active. Their eyes met.

"You're very beautiful, Mama," he told her impulsively.

"Whom do you consider to be the more beautiful, Janet or your mother?"

"Oh, really!" he almost rolled on the ground in his amusement. "Janet," he produced at length, "is nice and good-natured, like the pigeons up at Pinetree. But you—you're like quite another bird—I think you remind me of a black swan." And then, in the same breath: "Mama, why may I never go to Pinetree now?"

"I have already forbidden you," she reminded him, "to ask that question."

"But is it," he persisted, "because you or Papa have fallen out with Uncle Harry?"

"No!"

"Then why——"

"Be quiet, Robin, or I shall send you home."

This threat silenced him until they reached the cottage of the new carrier, situated at the fringe of the village.

"Run on now," she said, "and sail your boat, and I'll meet you later on the green, when I've finished talking to the blacksmith."

Before she had finished speaking he was out of sight.

Her business done, she walked at a leisurely pace towards the village. Before reaching the blacksmith's forge, she had to pass the green, with its stocks and scummy duck-pond, and here she paused to look indulgently for her son.

But the green wore an unusual aspect. She paused, uncertain. On the triangle of turf before the pond was pitched a nomad encampment of the type that she knew all too well. Two crazy, battered wagons, painted red and green,

one conical tent, a fire from which dense blue smoke ascended, two aged mules that, hobbled with old rags, picked at the grass as best they might. Gypsies. She stiffened with dislike, yet continued to stare. She perceived that about the fire were squatted a group of people so uncouth, so swarthy and barbaric and bedraggled, that she paused for a moment to stare at them contemptuously, a being from another world.

An old man wearing a crimson turban, nut-brown, wrinkled, and crafty of aspect. Somehow he reminded her of a wolf. A dishevelled witch of a woman, burnt almost black by exposure to sun and wind, her wild grizzled locks threaded with gold, her eyes glaring with a fixed and sinister light. Two young men, slim of hip, graceful, sinewy, careless, with big, velvety dark eyes and oiled locks falling upon their shoulders. Two younger women, the one an insolent devil, cunning as a fox, the other youthful, slim and lithe, already ripe with the early blossoming beauty of the East, that beauty of ebon-black and yellow ivory tinged with gold and flaming scarlet. Their rags were bright, so bright that they hurt and dazzled the eye, their quiet composure magnificent, for they seemed to make it plain that they cared for no man. Yet their eyes were the same, dark, deep-set, slanting eyes that had seen many strange sights, many alien lands, and were yet, for all their travels, unsatisfied, demanding more of life than life could ever give them.

Camila watched them for a moment in silence. Then, with a strange and chilly horror, she suddenly perceived the object upon which these sly, piercing eyes were focused.

Robin. He stood in the midst of the group, hatless, untidy, and seemed so much a part of it that it was obvious why she had not noticed him before. Dirty, his dark hair blowing in the wind, one hand upon his hip, he stood among them perfectly at ease, conversing quite coolly with these savage people, laughing gaily, his brown eyes warmly

admiring. It was then that she realised what a very gypsy he was, her son ; how perfectly and effortlessly he fitted into this wild and primitive gathering. She continued to watch him with a dumb and bitter anguish.

He seemed, she thought, now that he was with those of his blood, less human,—a different being from her own beloved child ; he was more impish, more than ever like a mischievous and half-grown faun. When the gypsies teased him good-naturedly enough, he mocked at them boldly, and flung back his head to laugh at them, exposing his sharp little white teeth, as though they were already good friends. He swaggered, moving his hips like the gypsy men beside him, who grinned down at him as though delighted by his impudence.

This sight, to Camila, was shocking and dreadful. For the first time she realised how strongly the dark blood she dreaded ran in the veins of her son. She stepped forward.

“ Robin ! ” she called harshly.

He turned to look at her, and with him the gypsies. She was confronted by the scrutiny of dark, slanting, cunning eyes. Robin’s eyes, she saw with panic, were indistinguishable from the rest.

“ Come here at once ! ” and she stamped her foot.

He obeyed her sullenly, reluctantly. He looked at that moment very like his father, as he approached her slowly, eyes downcast, mouth tight-shut and mutinous.

“ You are coming home at once,” she informed him furiously.

“ I thought you were to visit the blacksmith ? ”

“ Don’t argue with me and don’t loiter—come at once, when I tell you.”

“ Oh, very well.”

But he turned to the gypsies, waving his hand, wreathed in radiant smiles.

“ Do you hear me, Robin ? ”

He followed her in silence.

When they reached the outskirts of the village, she flew at him.

"How dare you talk to those people? How dare you make a show of yourself in the village, where everyone knows you? Have you no shame?"

"I like them," he declared firmly.

And then, completely losing her temper, she boxed his ears. He looked at her steadily, as though he thought her ridiculous.

"How dare you," she demanded, "how dare you say such a thing to me?"

He was honestly puzzled.

"But, Mama, I'm sorry if it vexes you. Yet I can't help liking them. They loved me, too, for they gave me, of their own accord, a beautiful foreign name."

"A name? What name?"

He smiled, and his eyes became soft and lustrous.

"Flamenco. Directly they saw me they called me Flamenco. Isn't that the sweetest word you ever heard?"

"Robin, do you want Papa to beat you?"

"I'm too big to be beaten. I'm eight years old. And why do you hate the Egyptians so much, Mama—the youngest lady, the pretty one, looked so much like you, if you were not so pale. And they have travelled all over the world. They——"

She caught his arm so tightly that he winced.

"Robin, listen. You are never to go near those people again. I absolutely forbid it. Do you understand?"

But already he had changed. Where before he would have been instantly penitent and striven at once to insinuate himself into her good graces, he now eyed her with a sulky side-long glance all too reminiscent of the men she once had known—Harry and Brazil.

"Robin, do you understand that I am in earnest?"

He kicked at a stone, eyes fixed on the ground.

"Answer me at once," she commanded him.

"Oh, Mama, there's nothing to say. I'd rather be beaten than never see those people again."

"Shall I tell you what they're really like?" she asked him in a quieter voice. "They're thieves, poachers, rascals and blackguards. They have no decent words, no decent thoughts. They are utterly and completely vile."

"How can you possibly know?" he asked her innocently.

"I *do* know."

"Well, I've always wanted to be a poacher."

And his smile was like a dark flash, as though the sun had fallen for one second upon a deep and shadowed mere.

She informed him coldly :

"When you reach home, you can go to bed at once, and you will get no supper."

"Very well, Mama."

But just before they arrived at the gates of Colereddy, he turned to her and said impetuously :

"Do you know that if you let your hair hang wild and were sunburnt, you would look more beautiful, far more beautiful, than the gypsy woman who named me Flamenco?"

For the second time within half-an-hour Camila lost her temper and boxed her son's ears.

CHAPTER LXI

"How late Robin is!" said Janet, as she sat uncomfortably at supper with Evelyn and Camila.

"He's not late," Camila told her. "He has been sent to bed in disgrace."

Evelyn poured himself a glass of port.

"What's the brat done now?"

"He has disobeyed me. Isn't that enough?"

"God knows. You probably stormed at him until he had no idea of what he was doing."

Her eyes sparkled with anger.

"Have you ever known me to storm at Robin, Evelyn?"

"I know you storm at me, and so does Janet. Why should you be more merciful to your child? Janet agrees with me, don't you, Janet?"

Janet grew pink and made no reply, looking down at her plate.

"What you think, or what Janet thinks," Camila told him wearily, "are of no consequence to me."

"Really, you become every day more like the Elf-King's bride, who is said by some to be a woman of ice. Soon you will freeze me up altogether."

She said nothing, but Janet had never seen her look paler or more wicked. And though she loved Robin, to what lengths might she not go, once her strange temper was aroused? She suggested timidly, fearful of Mrs. Lovell's sombre gaze:

"Would you like me to go to Robin's room and see if he is asleep yet?"

"No, thank you. I shall go myself, later."

"Really, Camila," Evelyn objected, "I quite dislike you

when you become so haughty. Can't you keep a civil tongue in your head ? ”

“ Can't you, for God's sake, leave me in peace ? ”

Janet, blushing more deeply, began to wriggle from her chair.

“ Don't go, Janet,” he commanded like a Rajah, “ or else my wife may scratch my eyes out. I entreat you to stay, Janet. I happen to consider my eyes my most fascinating feature.”

“ But,” she said nervously, “ Mrs. Lovell may need me upstairs.”

“ Rubbish. Mrs. Lovell is already asleep.”

“ But——”

“ But me no buts, Janet. And on no account leave me alone with my lady wife, for I am most terribly afraid of her devil's temper.”

Janet relapsed into confused silence. Camila, smiling in a way that sent shivers down her spine, helped herself to an apple.

Soon Evelyn became impatient.

“ Camila, are you likely to remain ill-tempered all the evening ? ”

“ If you don't like me,” she told him suavely, peeling her apple, “ you are always at liberty to go to London.”

“ Now, what exactly do you mean by that ? ”

“ You know well enough, without the unpleasantness of explanation before a third person.”

“ God damn you ! ” he said, banging his fist upon the table, “ Now you *shall* explain, without any further insinuations, exactly what you mean.”

“ There's no need to break the glasses.”

“ I'll break you, unless you answer me civilly.”

“ You won't have the chance ; I'm about to leave the room.”

“ Stay here, Camila ! ”

“ No, indeed I won't. You've got Janet.”

And with this parting shot she left them swiftly, closing

the door in their faces before they were aware of her departure.

Evelyn and Janet were left alone.

"I cannot and will not stand any more of these infernal tantrums," said Evelyn.

"She's put out to-night," Janet suggested charitably.

"Put out! Do you realise, Janet, what she was before I married her?"

"No. I'd better—I think I'd better——"

But he leaned across the table, fixing her with his sea-grey melancholy eyes.

"She was a gypsy, Janet, the harlot of a tramping gypsy ruffian. And I married her. What do you think of that?"

"I think you should not tell me such things. But it was splendid of you. You are indeed gallant, Mr. Evelyn."

"Gallant! What reward have I had for my gallantry? From the first she has always flouted me and flouted everyone. Sometimes I think she has a devil in her, and I'll stand it no longer—— Even her child—she's so jealous of him, so abnormally possessive, that he has never seemed to me more than a stranger. Nor has he ever been allowed to know me. What she needs, Janet, is a master, one whom she fears. She neither fears me nor loves me."

"But," began Janet, and then stopped abruptly.

He continued, paying no attention:

"She was sweeter in her wild days, when she ran out on the moors in pouring rain, and her hair, when she returned, was streaming like a black waterfall. But now she has become a woman of iron, and haughty, too, as though she came of decent stock."

"I wish," she told him earnestly, "that you were happier. What have you done to deserve so much trouble?"

He looked at her absently. She had forgotten, for the moment, how fierce and petulant he could be when he was thwarted. She saw only his round face, which she still thought handsome, his grey eyes, dark-ringed and haunting, his

clustering, silken, shining hair. He had certainly put on flesh ; his plump white hand, that wore a signet-ring, was smaller than a woman's ; and he was indolent, slothful, slow-moving, yet to her still beautiful. Somewhere, buried deep in his heart, there lay hidden the strange elfin charm that had made him seem so mischievously attractive since the day, long ago, when he had tried to kiss her on the stairs.

But he was tied for ever to this dark and sinister wife. And when he glanced at her, he did not perceive her mute devotion ; he saw, she thought, only a short, full-busted woman in a plain dress of dove-grey, a woman with a pleasant, honest face, a freckled nose, and prim braids of mouse-brown hair. So much for romance. And his gorgeous dressing-gown, she thought irrelevantly, fashioned of dull blue brocade, must certainly have cost him more than he could afford to pay.

As they mused, wrapped in their solitary thoughts, the door was flung open and Camila stood before them. Something important, Janet knew at once, must certainly have happened to transform her, for no longer was she a woman of iron, as Evelyn had so bitterly described her only a moment past, but a being on fire—tempestuous, dishevelled—cheeks aflame, eyes blazing with a strange wild light. A gypsy, of course ! She could, at that moment, be nothing else.

She was speaking, hoarsely, distractedly, to Evelyn.

" Robin. It's Robin. He has run away."

" Run away ? " Evelyn turned towards her almost indulgently, a brimming glass of port in his hand. " Where could he run, and what old wives' tale is this ? He's hiding from you, to put you in a fright."

" He's run away," she repeated more loudly. " Look at this letter which I have just found upon his pillow. Quick ! There's no time to be lost."

Evelyn examined the grubby piece of paper thrust upon his plate.

"DEAR MAMA,

"I am now to run away with the jipseys, they are such a fine peopel and will let me skin rabbits and wear a knife and drive their carts. Pleas do not be angry as I will return in a year or so with presents for all at home and be a chief as they have promised me. I am very hapy so do not be angry.

"With love from your son, Robin otherwise

"(Flamenco the Jipseys King)."

"Gypsies again?" he asked her softly. "Of what gypsies is he speaking? Have you let him run near their tents? Or have you, perhaps, apprenticed him to Brazil, the better to learn the trade of thieving?"

But before her furious gaze he quailed.

She said at length, in a more composed voice :

"There were gypsies on the green this morning. They'll be gone now. I forbade him to talk with them—that's why I sent him to bed, because he would do so against my wishes."

"Indeed?" and he looked her up and down vindictively, as though, after all, he were not best pleased to see once more the girl Camila, with her vivid, changeful face, her great eyes that flashed fire upon him, her warm, eager voice. She stammered—she had so much to say and there was so little time.

"Oh, well," he observed at length, "he'll turn up to-morrow and he'll have come to no harm, being a child of your own blood. And when he appears again, I'll thrash him."

"Do you really mean," she asked incredulously, "that you will sleep comfortable in your bed to-night and take no steps to find him before to-morrow?"

"Would you have me tramp the moor on this pitch-black night calling for a child that is well-nigh a stranger to me?"

"Evelyn, don't you love Robin? Can you really bear to leave him all night with Egyptian people?"

"*You* stayed with Egyptians a twelvemonth and have always sworn you were none the worse for it."

She said, controlling herself only by a desperate effort :

"We won't talk of that now. I'm thinking of Robin, only of Robin. We *must* search for him to-night—you and I, and William, and men from the village. There are two ponies in the stables, and lanterns too. Do you want us to wait until we are too late?"

"Do you seriously imagine that your delightful kinsmen will murder this child, who's run away to join them of his own accord, thinking himself, no doubt, a second Robin Hood?"

"I'm thinking of Plymouth, where there's always a boat ready to sail."

"Ah!"—he drained his port—"that's where your family went from, eh, Camila? You should know all about Plymouth."

"Listen, Evelyn," and she began to plead with him, ready even to humiliate herself for Robin's sake. "You did not see these gypsies—I did. There was one old man, his face wrinkled, dried-up like a mummy, so villainous, so evil and depraved, that it turns me sick to think of Robin being in his company even for five minutes. Listen! If you'll go out and search for him, with William and myself, I'll do as you bid me in the future and never argue with you again or cross you in any way."

Here Janet, who was already whimpering, slipped from the room. Neither noticed her; she might have been invisible.

Evelyn said coldly :

"You've kept the boy to yourself, Camila, and made him yours, not mine. Frankly, I feel in no way responsible. I married a gypsy, who has borne me a gypsy son. Is that any fault of mine?"

"You wanted me, when I came back to Colerreddy. All

the time you pleaded with me, and gave me no peace until I married you. You should have thought of your responsibilities then. Not now—it's far too late."

"Then stop raging at me. I've work to do."

"Do you really mean that you will do nothing for Robin to-night?"

He got up slowly from the table.

"No, and be damned to you. I won't. Find your lover, Brazil, and bid him bring back Robin. Egyptian matters are as a sealed book to me."

"Evelyn, unless you do as I tell you, I shall never live with you again as your wife."

"A fearful threat," he sneered, "and one that will keep me awake for many a night."

She put herself before the door, her face ravaged, distorted, with the grief and fury she was now enduring.

"How easily you forget. You couldn't wait once, but must needs drag me to bed at nine o'clock that all the house might laugh at us."

He smiled.

"Those days, my love, are finished and done with. Even Egyptian women cannot bewitch a man for ever. And now will you please stand aside?"

A wild idea flashed suddenly across her mind, and, clinging to it for consolation, she told him abruptly:

"Unless you help me, Evelyn, I shall go to Harry, up at Pinetree."

He laughed, and looked at her contemptuously.

"A brilliant idea, my love. If you can rouse Harry from his slumbers I shall salute you. But be careful—he is sure to have some harlot hid away in his house. And, since the trap is broken, you must drive in the old cart. But no matter—draw Harry from his doxies and make him search for Robin. But don't humiliate yourself, Camila: if he has retired, leave him to enjoy himself in peace."

Then, for the first time in all their married life, she struck him on the cheek, leaving a red and livid mark.

"My God," he said, looking at her dispassionately, "you had better be off, you and your ragamuffin son, and the sooner the better. You no longer tempt me, Camila ; you are free to return to your Romany lovers, you and the child. I am sick to death of these gypsy furies."

And smiling still, but with a bitterness that she had learned to know, he shut the door upon her.

CHAPTER LXII

With deft hands she harnessed the young chestnut pony, which had the reputation of travelling faster than its fellow in the ramshackle cart, and, with the wind tearing mercilessly at her ears, she soon lost all semblance of respectability.

In the village, where her cold graciousness of manner had of late inspired some awe, they greeted her with grinning faces, relieved, perhaps, to see once more the gypsy wildness written upon her tawny face, the straining elf-locks of her dark, dishevelled hair.

She asked when the Egyptians had left.

They considered, scratching their heads. Before dusk, some said, or immediately afterwards ; they had departed swiftly, with an unobtrusive slyness that made it hard to fix the time.

And where had they gone ?

At once they were unanimous—out upon the moor, past the great Tor, no doubt seeking the wildest and most desolate land, as was ever the custom of their race. And Master Robin had not been with them, unless stowed away in a wagon—of that they were convinced. He must have joined them, Camila thought, at the very gates of Colerreddy.

She drove on swiftly in the direction of Pinetree. The night was gloomy, so that the flare of her lamps shed twin patches of orange light upon the road ; a mournful wind howled querulously, and lashed her hair until it streamed behind her like dark plumes. The pony trotted steadily and surely ; the clip-clop of his hooves gave her comfort—she felt that he was doing his best to find Robin. As they ascended the winding, hilly road, great trees sprang out to startle them, black and solid, like great carven figures.

She thought not at all of Evelyn, whom she despised with all her heart, and not much of Harry, who had of late become so remote ; her thoughts were with Robin, her son, so slender and gay, so spirited and impish, Robin, who was even now trudging the sombre moor in company with that evil old man and woman, those brazen insolent young girls, those slim, complacent young men with their dangling ear-drops, their oiled ringlets that fell upon their shoulders. She tried to picture him weeping, suddenly afraid, and longing for his mother, but in this she failed, for she knew too well his self-confidence.

And he was a gypsy, a *flamenco*, in spite of all her efforts to make him conventional and genteel. She imagined, with a sigh, that even now he might be sleeping, gleefully enjoying the adventure, beneath the black tent of the open sky. She had only just begun to perceive this wild strain in him, and, wilfully blind, she had refused to consider it seriously. She had striven with all her might to make a gentleman of Robin ; now, too late, she realised how pitifully she had failed. Even his looks, that she had so much admired, his slim, wiry body, his smiling mouth, his tilted, impertinent nose, his deep brown, mischievous eyes, his dark, curling hair, these stamped him, surely, for anyone who knew the Calés, as a true gypsy child, playful, wild, heartless as a young animal. Of what use would it have been to send him to a lordly school from which, resentful of discipline, he would most assuredly have run away ? She tried, in a moment of impersonal detachment, to picture Robin's future life. She saw him refusing, not once but a hundred times, to endure a yoke he found irksome. Harry's stubborn rebelliousness, combined with her own savage blood—these could not, she sadly realised, produce a being capable of living up to the ideals she had ordained for him. No, it was better to face such problems honestly, and the problem of Robin, who had already, at eight, thrown off the shackles of authority, seemed to her simple enough.

Sooner or later, he would run wild upon the moor, and

fraternise with pedlars and their doxies, stay out all night snaring conies, and return to her only when he was hungry or tired. And she remembered bitterly the rosy future that she once had planned for him—shooting-parties at noblemen's homes, powdered lackeys, elegant dinner-parties, blooming, susceptible heiresses. And already, although he was but a child, he would have mocked at such pomposities.

Then, as she arrived at Harry's first gate, she was once more reminded of her lover. But was he still her lover? She had seen him so little during the past seven years, and when they were together, for however brief a space, they had sneered at one another, forgetful of their love, thinking only of their hot and bitter and enduring pride.

As she shut the first gate, the rain began to pour pitilessly from the heavens ; before long, her hair was drenched and her pale face glittering with moisture.

"He'll have a woman with him," she thought sadly, and opened the second gate. Yet, when she arrived in the yard and saw his kitchen-window cheerfully aglow, she felt more hopeful. She tethered her pony to the staple-ring, found it a rug, and drew near the house diffidently, too timid to try the door. For a moment she hesitated, then thought of Robin, Robin who was now alone on the moor with a party of cut-throat Spanish gypsies.

She approached the window and tapped upon it faintly, while the fierce rain slashed at the dark disorder of her hair.

At first there was no answer ; then, as she heard the door open, her heart leaped wildly, signalling that her lover was near at hand.

She heard his voice, rough and angry :

"Who's there? Come out, can't you, if you need me?"

She approached the door slowly, her face hidden in the dripping tangle of her hair. He gaped at her for a moment and then enquired :

"I suppose you've come for a cup of tea? Well, in that case——"

"Oh, don't, Harry! I've come to you for good and all. It's Robin—I am most terribly troubled about Robin."

In a moment, she knew not how, she had been transported from the rain and cold outside into the warmth of his gay peat-fire, that burned brighter than a sunflower.

She asked vaguely, shaking her hair:

"Have you a woman here? Must I hide myself?"

"No. I'm alone. Tell me quickly, what has Robin done?"

She told him and wept. But he laughed, his face darkly triumphant in the firelight.

"Indeed? Well, I'll get him back for you by to-morrow, if I scour every inch of Dartmoor. But you'll stay now, Camila—no more Colereddy. Do you understand?"

"I'll stay," she murmured. "Robin and I will both stay. We can't, it seems, be gentlefolk, so we had better live wild with you."

"Is that the only reason?"

"No, indeed it isn't. I've not changed, Harry—I've never changed."

"Then kiss me, before I saddle my pony."

She smiled then, and flung her arms about his neck. As she clung to him, it seemed to both that at once a new life was born within her to warm her blood.

"How I have hated you!" she whispered.

"And I you, you witch! But all that's finished and done with. We're together now—no one can part us."

She asked him, laying her cheek against his, so rough and tanned and nut-brown:

"Do you think, Harry, that you may really find your son?"

"By daylight to-morrow," he told her confidently. "I heard only this afternoon of these Egyptians in the village. Old Noakes, the poacher, told me that when they left, they would take the roughest path, the one that leads to Satan's Tor. That ugly black pony of mine is fast, and surefooted into the bargain; I should catch them by daybreak. By

the way, he thought them the same folk as once brought you to these parts "

But she was not listening.

" Can't I come with you ? "

" What, drive a cart along that wild track in the darkness ? No, indeed you shan't, and what's more, while I'm gone, you must go and sleep in my bed, for you look tired to death, Camila. And I'll put your pony in the stable."

Why, she wondered, had he so strange a fascination for her, this clumsy thick-set man with his olive skin, his grim face, and his perverse sulky pride ? She could not find the answer. Harry was right ; she was exhausted, and her eyes were blinking.

" Go to bed, Camila. Here's a candle."

" I shan't sleep."

" Oh, yes you will. But make haste—I should be starting."

Yet there they still stood on the doorstep, so close together that they were a dark mass, indistinguishable from the frowning blackness of the night. Only Harry's kitchen window, beaming like some great ruddy lantern into the world outside, illuminated their white faces with a ghostly reddish glow.

" Remember," he warned her, " it's for ever and ever now."

" For ever and ever," she repeated. " There'll be no turning back this time, neither for you nor me, nor for Robin, if you find him."

" You're sacrificing all you planned for this boy, Camila. No fine school, no grand friends, only the moor, and Pine-tree, and parents whom none will visit, because of the sinful life they lead."

" So long as I have him, I shall be content now. I've learned my lesson, Harry. I know Robin can never be brought up as a gentleman. So long as I have him, so long as I have you, life will be sweet enough."

" Go and snatch some sleep."

And he kissed her once more and thrust her back inside the house.

The kitchen fire had sunk low. Only one piece of coal still had life enough to gleam at her, like a great ruby, across the floor. And the room seemed full of cats, that padded close to her, and purred, and the clock ticked slowly, with a grave guttural sound. So had it been on the night of the thunderstorm, when she and Harry had learned for the first time to love each other.

Now that he had gone, she realised how weak and tired she was, how utterly broken with anxiety and fatigue. She lit her bedroom candle and went slowly upstairs, clinging to the handrail, yawning until her eyes were filled with tears. Harry's bedroom was big and bare. She noticed vaguely the dark oak bed, with its gay patchwork quilt, the cobbled red-and-white check curtains, the bright sporting-prints on the wall, and, near the fireplace, Fox, who slept on the hearthrug and opened one eye as though he had been for long expecting her and was glad to bid her welcome. Why, she wondered drowsily, now that she was really here, comfortable and secure—why had she not come before? For several years Evelyn had neglected her, and Robin, undisciplined, impulsive, would have been the first to rejoice at shaking the dust of Coleruddy from his restless feet.

Yet she had tried to do her best for Robin, had tried, for his sake, to keep on friendly terms with her husband. And all for nothing. Evelyn disliked her and had, indeed, told her so very plainly but a few hours since—Robin had run off, light-heartedly, with the first strangers to beckon him away from her.

She slipped off her dress and her petticoat, with its swaying hoop, and stood there, slim, taut, almost childish, in her white shift, with her dark locks streaming about her shoulders. No one, she thought, even seeing her weary as she was to-night, would have imagined that she had passed twenty-six—she still had youth and grace to offer Harry.


It was cold, and Fox was sound asleep.

She crept into the bed, burying her face on the pillow against which his head had so often rested. And he had waited so long for her, more than eight years—why had she not come before? She thought, as she put out the candle:

“Of what use is civilisation to us, to gypsy people, like Robin and myself? We learn a little—how to eat properly at table and how to ape the ways of gentlefolk, and then we are thought to be safe, but we aren’t, we are never really safe. In the end we always escape, because there is nothing to bind us to their strange and curious ways. Robin, myself—we are both equally to blame—he heard the call of his people, and I have come to Harry. We can’t, in the end, control our wildness. These things are stronger than ourselves.”

And she remembered, before she fell asleep, how she had played the lady during the last few years, with her fine clothes, her haughty ways, her proud self-control, and she smiled, because she knew that she had been play-acting all the time.

And when she had fallen asleep, she dreamed, not of Robin whimpering with fear in the wagons of the Egyptian people, but of Robin gay, jubilant, dancing to the strains of a sweet, wild, devilish music that must already have set his blood afire, a music so strident and passionate and colourful that, of all the world, only the moon-folk could produce such sounds from the strings of their crazy instruments. *Flamenco* music. And so she slept soundly, her anxiety for her son partially lulled, since, although she did not know it, she herself had been born to that same music of which she dreamed.



CHAPTER LXIII

Just before midnight, when Colerreddy lay silent, save for the scurrying of mice, Janet came downstairs with a candle in her hand. She saw a light beneath the study-door and tapped upon it timidly, anxious to discover if there was news of Robin.

Evelyn invited her to enter, and she found him lolling carelessly enough before his fire, a volume of poetry on his knee. He turned to look at her blankly, for he had been dozing, and his chestnut hair was ruffled.

"Well, Janet. What can I do for you?"

"Oh, I'm sorry to have disturbed you. I only wanted to know if, by any chance, Robin had been found?"

"No. But when he is, and brought back here, I'll thrash him within an inch of his life."

Janet's brow puckered.

"But, Mr. Evelyn, I can't help being very anxious. It's wild and dark out on the moors to-night, and he's so young——"

"All the better," he interrupted, yawning, "he'll learn not to play such pranks again. Besides, you forget he's Mrs. Lovell's son as well as mine—to such savages the moor's a soft enough bed, even in a thunderstorm."

"But Robin's a child, only eight——"

"He cannot learn obedience too soon. And I blame myself for marrying into an accursed race."

"Has Mrs. Lovell gone up to bed?" she asked.

"Not she. She insulted me, and I packed her off to Pinetree, where she thought to enlist my brother's aid."

"You sent her to your brother, up at Pinetree?"

"Have you any objection?"

She answered hastily, fluttering her hands in her agitation :

“ Not if you have none.”

“ What the devil are you talking about ? ” he demanded, eyeing suspiciously her scarlet cheeks, her sly, evasive eyes.

“ Oh, nothing. I must go to bed now, Mr. Evelyn, and bid you good night——”

He repeated insistently, his eyes fixed keenly upon her :

“ Why should my wife not go to Pinetree ? ”

“ Mr. Evelyn, I must ask you to question me no further. I meant no harm, and already I’m half-asleep——”

“ By God, you shan’t go ! ” and he jumped out of his chair to seize her wrists.

“ Now ! Answer me ! Do you suppose my wife and Harry to be lovers ? ”

“ Oh, let me be ! You’re hurting ! How dare you treat me so ? ”

His eyes gleamed with the fiendish light she had so often observed before :

“ Will you answer my question at once, or must I twist your wrist until you tell me ? Is Camila Harry’s mistress ? ”

At that she flew into a fine passion, she who was so meek and quiet, and yet so jealous of the gypsy.

“ You gaby ! ” she said. “ You great blind fool, to think yourself so clever ! Well, I, who am not clever, guessed, when first I came here, that they were lovers, although of late they have been so much apart. . . . Even your mother knows, and sometimes laughs about it to herself, like the wicked sinful old woman she is. But *you*, who send her up to Pinetree, while you loll about down here reading poetry, although your son is lost—you are more stupid than anyone I ever met, or else more heartless ! ”

He stared at her in silence, his eyes like grey cold water, a vicious half-smile playing over his white face.

“ Indeed,” he said, still grasping her arm, “ I’m vastly obliged to you, miss, for your agreeable information. So she has gone to Harry, and may they both burn in hell

together, for they're admirably suited, with their black looks and savage ways ! But I have no intention of being neglected myself, and since you, Janet, came to me all flushed and eager and jealous of my wife, and so solicitous about my domestic problems, you shall be mine, now, this very moment. My love ! There ! Are you not flattered ? ”

And still with the wicked elf-look in his eyes, he drew nearer, thin-lipped, hungry, pitiless.

But the Puritan in her revolted. Apart from the evil that he was suggesting to her, his white, greedy look appalled her, and quite suddenly, in one brief frightened moment, her innocent love for him flew away.

“ Leave me alone ! ” she screamed, and, pushing away his face, succeeded in disengaging herself. In a moment she was out of the room and running up the stairs, her heart jumping in her breast like a frightened bird.

When she regained her room, she locked the door and wept. How she hated the whole pack of them ! Surely they were devils, one and all, too wicked to be human ; even Robin, her favourite, had often seemed to her more graceless, less innocent, than any other child she knew.

“ To-morrow,” she vowed, “ I'll pack up and leave at dawn by the carrier's cart ! ”

The morning broke stormily, with tearing slate-grey clouds, a slash of gentian sky, the palest gleam of sunlight, and a bold and raging wind.

For a moment Camila lay puzzled by her new surroundings. Where was she, and where was Evelyn ? Her arm hung loosely from the bed, and she was astonished to feel against it the cold, wet nose of Fox. Then she remembered—Robin was lost and she had come to stay for good with Harry.

She sat up in bed and pushed back the tangled locks of hair that hung about her face. Oh, where was Robin, and how could she have slept so peacefully, utterly forgetful of his fate ?

"What's the matter, Fox?" she asked, with a sigh, for the dog was capering excitedly about the room. It occurred to her that he wanted to go out, and, wrapping her shawl about her, she went to open the door. Then, as Fox bounded past, she heard in the kitchen below a confused medley of noise. The sound of voices—Harry's voice, loud and rather harsh.

"Harry! Harry!" she called from the landing.

But he took no notice. He was silent now, while another voice held forth, clear and shrill and childish—the voice of Robin, who appeared to be making merry at some remark of his father's.

"You damned impudent little cub," observed Harry—but he spoke indulgently.

She advanced indignantly to the foot of the stairs.

"Harry! Robin!" she called imperiously. "How dare you stay down there? Come upstairs at once."

There was a short silence; then, after a moment, the clattering of feet, as they hastened to obey her summons.

She hugged the black shawl about her body and waited, her face veiled in the dark mantle of her hair, for this first reunion with her family. And so, if she laughed, neither one could see her smiling mouth nor tell if she was stern or joyful.

THE END



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